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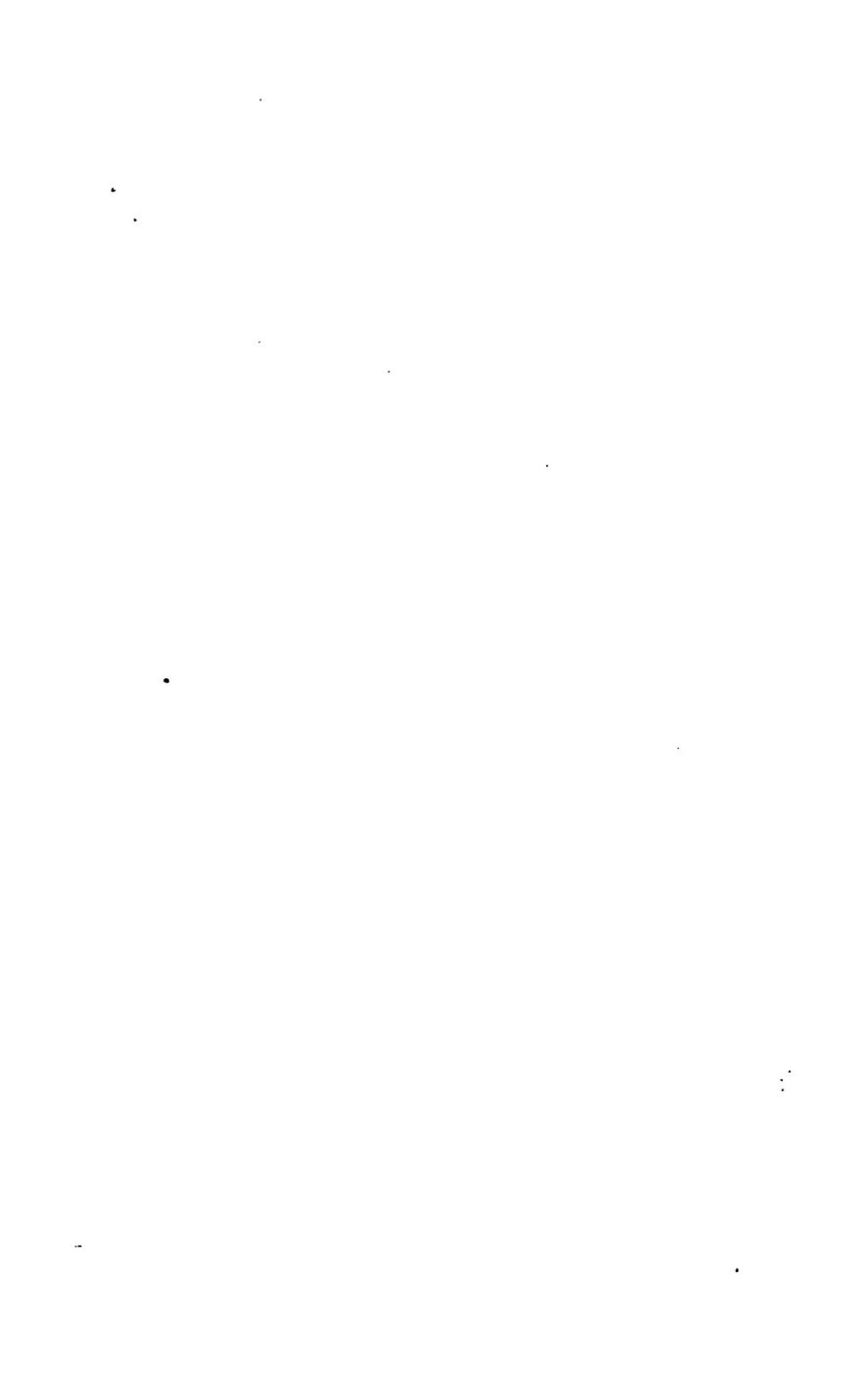
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THORNTON HALL;

OR,

OLD QUESTIONS IN YOUNG LIVES.

BY

PHEBE F. McKEEN,
AUTHOR OF "THEODORA CAMERON."



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CHAPTER I.

FROM SOMEBODY TO NOBODY.



HAVE a splendid compliment for you, Belle Stanton," announced Florence Hare, as five or six girls were gathered in her room for "a regular sederunt."

"Better not tell me, it might make me vain," quoth Belle, demurely.

"Dear me: now cool we are! What would you give to know, now?"

"Half a pound of caramels. Who said it?"

"Oh, that's telling. Somebody thinks you are the beauty of Thornton Hall."

"How ridiculous!" ejaculated Belle.

"It isn't either." "Everybody says so." "You must know it yourself," chimed the admiring group, Grace Fanshaw finishing with,—

"I have no remarks to make about ordinary cases, but I *will* say that in that ruby suit you are quite passable."

"Well," said Belle, willing to turn attention from herself, "that is nothing so nice a compliment as my brother paid you the other day Helen."

A clamor on all sides for the compliment—Helen Campbell silent, but not indifferent. Belle's brother was the admiration of the young ladies. After due coaxing, Belle divulged that he had said that Helen Campbell had the best quality of brains he knew of in a girl.

Upon this, arose a furious debate whether this tribute was not to be spurned as derogatory to the female mind; but Florence happening to have the highest voice, rose on top of the wave and settled the dispute with,—

"Ladies! take what you can get. If Mr. John Stanton is so benighted as to suppose girls are

not equal, nay, superior to boys, he is to be regarded as missionary ground. The day will come when he will hide his diminished head in the splendor of Helen Campbell's renown. I do myself proud to entertain the beauty and the genius of Grattan Seminary in my humble apartment."

Ending with a grand flourish, she passed around on a pasteboard box-cover, as salver, two squares of popped-corn cake, a small heap of chocolate creams, and a pickle.

"‘A simple gift, yet it may tell,’" etc.

As the merry company were regaling themselves on these viands, Florence remarked,—

"You are welcome to your scholarship, Nell. I have no great ambition in that line"—the girls all knew it would be no use if she had—"but there is one thing I do covet. I would n't care if I was as homely as a witch, if I could *sing*—sing like Virginia Raleigh. There's nothing in the world I envy like that."

"I am sure I would give more to play as you do," said Alice Hazeltine. "I don't see what business you have to envy any girl in the musical line."

"I like to watch Mr. Wilmot when Florence is playing," remarked Grace Fanshaw.

"So do I," said Belle. "He glories in you, Flo. I am glad he has one girl at last worthy of her teacher. It is lucky your lesson hour comes directly after mine, to save him from despair."

Florence laughed, and passed Belle a bit of pickle on the end of a paper folder, as she turned the conversation, saying,—

"I went to walk with your sister Kate last night, Nell, and I thought I never should get home. Actually, between laughing and trying to keep from fairly screaming in the street, I thought I should die on her hands."

"Oh, she makes no end of fun at our table," said Alice Hazeltine, and the good-natured girls went on relating the jokes of the irrepressible Kate till the study bell broke up their junto; Belle taking possession of Florence to find out the little fact on which the value of her compliment depended—who gave it.

The bell which had just rung sent one young lady from each room to the sitting-room to study, that she might leave her room-mate alone. The house being unfortunately constructed so as to give but one room to every two pupils, this arrangement was necessary to secure to each an opportunity to be alone, morning and evening—

an opportunity prized even by those who did not, as most did, hold it sacred to the Father who seeth in secret.

Alice Hazeltine went to her little room, threw back a smile and a jest to some schoolmate passing along the hall, but the moment she had closed the door and turned the key, threw herself on the floor beside her lounge and buried her face in her arms, in an attitude of utter dejection. The early stars were twinkling in at her window, but she looked up at them with knit brows and set teeth. Then she started to her feet, brushing an angry tear from her eye.

"It is all true," she said to herself, "and that's the worst of it. They are the brightest, prettiest, smartest, and I am neither one thing nor another. I hate betweenities! I would rather be an idiot!" and she flung herself down on the lounge and gazed sullenly into the night, in a tumult of discontent.

Poor Alice! She had been a petted child at home; easily first in the small private school she had long attended; quite an authority among the young people of the village, as her father was among their parents; but this year had brought her a new and humiliating experience.

She had found herself on an equal footing with about fifty young ladies, most of them from families of culture, many of them more accustomed to refined society than herself, better read. Instead of being distinguished for scholarship, she had hard work to maintain her standing in the second rank. Instead of having the leadership conceded to her, as it always had been at home, she often found the ruling spirits of the school not even concerning themselves whether she followed or not. She was too proud to betray the chagrin she felt, but it was none the less galling. And the worst of it was, as she said, that it was "all true." She could see for herself that there were girls about her with whom it was hopeless for her to compete. There was nothing, she thought, bitterly, in which she was not second to somebody. She was "fair," in every respect, but that was all. This unwelcome consciousness, which had been swelling in her breast for weeks, had reached its climax in this quiet hour, when she was left alone to commune with her own soul and God.

"Let him take up his cross daily and follow me." Somehow, as she gazed out from her rebellious heart into the solemn depths of starlight

those words, read at prayers in school that morning, came back to her. "To bear patiently whatever the Master lays upon you, to do cheerfully whatever He gives you to do,—this is to take up your cross daily and follow Him," Miss Douglass had said.

Alice was apt to listen to those plain earnest talks, so it was not strange that the saying which had dropped into her heart in the morning should make itself heard in the hush of the evening.

"This is my cross—to be a nobody; I cannot help myself; He has laid it upon me. Am I willing to bear it patiently? To be just respectable; always to be 'Miss Middlings?' *Can* I take thankfully what He has given me and make the most of it, without grumbling that it is no more?"

It was a sharp struggle. She felt that her will was planted in hopeless but angry rebellion against the will of her Creator—felt that it ought to lie down at His feet. Would it?

The bell rang, and, instantly, opening doors, voices, footsteps, broke the stillness. A moment more and her solitude would be gone. With a great sob, she whispered, "Oh, Saviour, help me to take up my cross and follow Thee!"

"Let me in! Please let me in," from her

room-mate at the door, ended the prayer, but it only crowded it down and condensed it. Her Lord knew that she meant it.

"What! all in the dark?" exclaimed Maggie.

"Yes; I liked it, but I will have a light for you in a minute."

"Oh, no, never mind! Run along, dear, or you will be tardy; I will light up. Here's your Chemistry," with a friendly little push out of the room.

"Thanks! You are a jewel," said Alice, taking the book and starting to go down stairs.

"Who's a jewel?" asked Hortense Harvey, happening along at the same time.

"Maggie McBride. She is just the nicest kind of room-mate—saves me from getting tardy a dozen times a-day. She always knows what I want, and never runs against me, nor bothers me with questions when I am in a hurry. You don't know how entertaining she is, too."

"No; I never saw her charms," remarked Hortense, in a dry way, which nettled Alice, and made her run a damaging comparison between the loud, flashy Miss Harvey, and her sweet, sensible Maggie.

"Have you looked at this chemistry lesson?"

asked Hortense. "It is perfectly fearful. It will give me brain fever, I'm certain of it. Dear me! Would n't it be fine if we could learn our lessons, as Belle Stanton does hers?"

That was a hard hit. It had never occurred to Alice that she did not learn as easily and as well as Belle Stanton;—then to have a dunce like Hort Harvey saying, "*we*," and pitying her along with herself! It was too much. The "tardy bell" struck, the girls all nestled into their places and fell to studying. Alice leaned her head on her hand and bent her eyes on her book, but it was no use. In vain she read over and over again, "When calcic fluoride is acted upon by sulphuric acid, a very corrosive gas is obtained, called hydric fluoride (hydrofluoric acid). The reaction is shown in the following equation— $H_2 SO_4 + Ca F_2 = Ca SO_4 + HF$."

The sour morsel Hortense had thrust into her mouth had set her teeth on edge. "*We*," indeed, from Hort Harvey, who, half the time, said, "I know, but I can't think," and the other half, bungled together a few sentences, wrong end foremost, with the essential idea left out. Had she sunk so low?

Then she was provoked to find herself so much

provoked. Did the triumphant outcome of the struggle she had just been through, amount to nothing? She thought she had reached the right ground and was ready to go on, humbly, but courageously; here she was, floundering in the same old bog.

She forced herself to think it over calmly. Was she really only a match for Hortense Harvey? She tried to judge impartially, and she could not but be conscious she was decidedly her superior. "At least, I know when I don't know," she said to herself; "and with her, known and unknown seem to be mixed in one promiscuous muddle."

Hortense was obtuse and selfish; she had really been thinking only of herself, and had dragged down her schoolmate with her in the "we," without the least consideration. There she was, the other side of the study table, contemplating the trimming of Grace Fanshaw's dress, with eyes as placid as a cow's, without a conception of the tumult her little remark had raised.

"I was a fool to mind it," thought Alice. "But am I as good a scholar as Belle Stanton? No matter, I am to be just as good as it is possible for me to be; that's my limit, and if the limit

comes too soon, why—that's my cross, and I must bear it."

So calm returned, the sky cleared, and she could see to study. The chemistry lesson was well learned, though the time was short, because it was mastered by a mind fresh and vigorous from self-conquest.

CHAPTER II.

GOING DOWN TOWN.



OME, Con Brewster! I can't wait all day for you to prink. A'n't you 'most ready?" asked Sue Carter, discontentedly, coming into Constance's room for the third time all ready for walking.

"Just in three seconds. This horrid old ribbon won't come into any shape," replied Connie, who had been at the glass, for fifteen minutes, trying to concoct a new knot for her necktie. "There; will that do?"

"Elegant! How in the world did you do it? Dear me, Con! You do look too lovely for any-

thing in those violet ribbons. I only hope we sha'n't meet Coggin. It would be too much for him."

"Oh, hush! You silly child," said Connie, turning away to hide a complacent smile. "Where's my veil? There, Sue, if you will just fasten that for me——. I am all ready."

"What are you going to wear a veil for? I hate them."

"Oh, well, you don't need one, but my face is so horridly red!"

"Horridly red!" The little innocent knew what she was about. The mirror showed her, plainly enough, how the delicate tissue toned down her glowing color, softened outlines, shaded her bright eyes, and made a bewitching little mystery of her. Poor Sue Carter didn't "need it," indeed, for there was nothing in her face to see, if you saw the whole of it. However, Vanity can get on with the smallest stock in trade, and Sue Carter was quite as vain and self-satisfied as any girl in school.

"Now, where are my violet gloves?" said Connie, pulling open her "top drawer" with a jerk which started all the little boxes out of their tracks.

‘ Well ! I should think it was fortunate for you Miss Hurd did n’t examine rooms this week,’ said Sue, as Connie pulled over an indiscriminate pile of ribbons, collars and gloves.

“ That’s so ; this was all in apple-pie order last Wednesday ; but who can stop to put everything in just such a place, every time, the life we live here ? ”

“ If you don’t stop to put things away, you have to stop to hunt for them ; so I don’t see but what it is six to one and half a dozen to the other, only you get cross hunting, and you don’t putting things away.

Order was one of Sue’s strong points. She was really a nice housekeeper, in her little domain, and prided herself upon it.

“ Do hurry ; we sha’n’t have any time at all.”

Connie flew around, searching high and low, and at last found her gloves, stuffed into a work-box, to be mended.

“ There now ; do come. It is half-past four already.”

Sue did not say what was the particular necessity of being out by half-past four ; she would have resented it if you had suggested that was just the hour the students came out from

prayers ; so of course that was not it. No doubt if that had occurred to her, she would have tried to go earlier or later. As it was, these two modest little maidens were forced to meet the curious gaze of a whole stream of students. Sue hung on the arm of her friend, like a dead weight; looked demure as she passed certain young men, then became so animated, so amused, burst into such laughter, that they could not but turn their heads to look at her. Sue took it for granted that none looked at her but to admire; none named her but to praise. So she was always satisfied if she was only noticed. The more the students looked at her, the more she smiled and minced, and tossed her head and laughed at everything Connie said ; and the more boldly the young fellows gazed at her as she passed, and the more sneeringly they glanced at each other and smiled after they got by.

“ There ! There they are ! ” said Sue, giving Connie a nudge.

Two rather jaunty-looking sophomores were approaching, twirling their newly allowed canes. Suddenly there was a fluttering of white linen ; Sue’s handkerchief became indispensable. Connie’s hand went into her pocket, but some in-

stinct of modesty said, "I won't," and it came out again without the flag of truce. She saw the emphatic glance of admiration given her as the gentlemen passed, and turned away her pretty head and smiled, more pleased than she would have confessed to herself.

"Let's go into Rand's and get a Frank Leslie," said Sue.

She must have spoken louder than she intended, for the young men evidently heard; and it was not three minutes after the girls had entered the little news and confectionery shop, before they were at the opposite counter, asking for cigars.

At once the conversation became animated. The young gentlemen and ladies did not speak to each other; of course not; they were not acquainted; but if people will overhear what you say, how can you help it?

If Mr. Coggin learned that Miss Brewster doted on cream candies, was it anything more than common benevolence for him quietly to order a box of them for her? and how was she to guess where they came from? If the young gentlemen profited by Sue Carter's opinion that some of the sophomores were "stunning in their

tall hats," was she responsible for it? She did not say it to them. It was natural enough that the two girls should lay their plans to walk the next day down to the Old Bridge, and if the two young men choose to stroll at the same hour, in the same direction, they had no right to prevent it, of course.

At last the Frank Leslie and a brown paper bag of maccaroons were bought, the elegant little box of candies taken, with much wondering gratitude to the unsuspected giver, and with the loudly expressed fear that Miss Douglass would take their heads off if they stayed any longer, Susie and Connie departed, and walked rapidly up the street, talking in eager under-tones.

"Did you hear him say how pokey the old town is without any ladies' society?"

"Yes, but *did* you mind Clough's gloves? Gracious! They look as if his hands were melted and run into them. Never saw such a fit in all my life," said Sue.

"I didn't like his necktie any how—great flashy thing! I think it's horrid!" objected Connie.

"It is n't, either! It's real nobby; enough handsomer than that little scrimpy one of Coggins," retorted Sue.

"I don't care," returned Connie, "Clough looks as if it took him all his time to get himself up, and Coggin as if he was stylish because he could n't help it."

The young damsels were pursuing their way, absorbed in this high discourse, when they passed Mr. Scranton's elegant residence. There was young Scranton, leaning gracefully on the gate, gazing forth into the world. As they came along he drew himself up, doffed his hat to Sue, and, stepping out, said,—

"Beg your pardon, Miss Carter, but would you oblige me?" taking from his pocket a little billet, and handing it to her as he spoke.

"Oh certainly!" said Sue, with a smile and a glance, which expressed, "You can rely on me."

"What is it?" teased Connie as they went on, "How did he know you?"

"I don't know; somehow all the young gentlemen seem to know me. I don't know how it is, I 'm sure," replied Sue, with a complacent simper.

"Who was it for?"

"Grace Fanshaw."

"It is! How does he know her?"

"Who said he did know her?"

"Why, he would n't dare write to her if he did n't, would he?"

"Why not? He dares do what he likes. The girls are all crazy after him."

"Grace Fanshaw is n't crazy after him," asserted Connie, rather scornfully. The fact was, Miss Fanshaw was her ideal realized. She was so graceful, so well-bred; she had such an easy nonchalant way of doing things which would have required a mighty effort of independence from most of the girls. Connie was curious to see how she would receive an advance like this. It was true that most of the girls would have looked upon an unwarrantable attention from "that handsome Scranton," whose father had "a mint of money" and "perfectly elegant grounds," as graciously as from any one in town.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Connie, as they came in sight of the clock on the Court House, "we are awfully late. What shall we do?"

"Oh we can get excused easy enough. Tell her you were delayed going out; you were, you know; you could n't find your gloves, and then we couldn't get through our errands down street in season."

"We could, though."

"Why, no, we could n't, I 'm sure ; there 's no need of making such a fuss if we are not there just such a minute. We must take a little comfort of our lives—not be always ~~on~~ the rush."

Constance said nothing, but she knew the excuse was a false one, and the honesty of her nature and habits remonstrated.

"I 'll get it excused for you, if you like," said Sue.

"I wish you would." It was easier to let a lie be told for her than to tell it herself.

CHAPTER III.

REJECTED ADDRESSES.



IRECTLY after tea Connie and Sue called at Miss Fanshaw's room. It was their first visit; as she was a Senior, with a circle of strong friends of her own, and they were Juniors, they had but little to do with each other. They found Helen Campbell and Belle Stanton in the room. Connie was received rather cordially, Sue somewhat coolly, for

Miss Fanshaw was frank to a fault in showing her preferences.

"Excuse me, girls. I want to whisper to Miss Fanshaw just a minute," said Sue.

"Oh speak out!" exclaimed Grace. "I hate buzzing in one's ears."

"But it's a *secret*," returned Sue, in an undertone, flushing up.

"Be kind enough to keep it to yourself, then. I am not fond of secrets."

"Just as you please," replied Sue, with an air of offended dignity, turning to leave the room.

I had a message to deliver, if your ladyship had pleased to receive it."

"She has a letter for you," said Connie, in a low tone.

"If you have anything of mine, I will take it," said Grace.

Sue flung the note in her lap, flounced out of the room and slammed the door after her. Connie rose to follow, but Miss Fanshaw detained her.

"Really, Grace, you were too bad," said Helen Campbell. "She did not mean any harm."

"I detest her sly, sneaking ways, and I did n't want any of her miserable little secrets. I am sorry if I was rude, though. I suppose I was."

Meanwhile she was deliberately tearing open the billet; it took only a moment to read it.

"I think I see myself doing it," she said, in a tone of quiet contempt, with a slight raising of the eyebrows and curl of the lip.

"What's that?" asked Belle, who was watching her face with an amused air. Somehow that face expressed so much with so little change of its lines that it was always a study to Belle.

"This precious young gentleman hopes I will do myself the honor to meet him by moonlight and skulk down some back lane. I take it that's what it means, is n't it?" giving the note, which had slid to the floor, a little push towards Bellc with the toe of her slipper.

Bell picked it up and read :

"MISS F.,—Pardon the admiration of a stranger, if I beg the favor of your acquaintance. Eight o'clock, Monday evening, head of the Brook path. If you will meet me, please wear a blue ribbon in your hair to church, to-morrow.

"Devotedly, S. V. S."

"Nell Campbell, what have I ever done, that this puppy should presume to send me such a thing as that?" demanded Grace.

At that moment came a rap at the door, and Helen's sister Kate, put in her head.

provoked. Did the struggle she had nothing? She then ground and was courageously; her same old bog.

She forced herself. Was she really dismayed? She tried to could not but be her superior. "All know," she said to herself, and unknown seemed a dubious muddle."

Hortense was obviously been thinking only down her schoolmate's side of the story, the least consideration of the other side of the situation. The trimming of Grace was as placid as a cow's. Tumult her little room,

"I was a fool to think I am I as good a school-matter, I am to be just for me to be; that

ated in the West," said Belle. "One of the young ladies, who was so soft, she thought everybody was in love with her, got a note, one day, from one of the students in the university in the place, professing to be greatly smitten with her. She was mightily pleased, and showed it around among the girls, much to their delight. They sent her up to answering it; though she did n't need much urging, I guess. Two or three letters passed, and then he begged for an interview, and proposed that, for safety, they should meet in the engine-house. You see the seminary was heated by steam, and the engine-house was quite a little distance away, with a kind of subterranean passage leading to it. This girl was mortally afraid, but she thought she must meet her admirer at all hazards; so she took one confidential friend with her, and went groping down, in the evening, all expectation—and was greeted by a shout of laughter from half a dozen girls, who had got up the whole performance."

"Poor thing!" said Helen Campbell. "I think it was cruel."

"I don't," cried Kate, with a positive nod of her mischievous head. "It was just good enough for her. If girls will be such geese as to corre-

spond with strangers, they *ought* to suffer for it."

"But to entrap anybody into making a fool of herself, and then taunt her with it, I call mean," persisted Helen.

"You see, she was such a fool to begin with," argued Kate, "that severe remedies were necessary. I think those girls were real benefactors to take her in hand, and teach her a lesson she would n't soon forget."

"And you think you could persuade yourself to do as much for Sam Scranton," laughed Belle.

"Yes," with a deep sigh; "Samuel Scranton might make a worthy young man if he was cured of this weakness; and I feel called upon to undertake his case, whatever it costs me." Getting down on her knees beside Grace, and putting her arms around her, she went on: "Now, you will just wear that pretty blue bow in your bonnie brown hair to-morrow, won't you? That's a love!"

"I should rather think not," said Grace, smiling at her eagerness.

"Now, why won't you?" teased Kate. "You see we can't get him out without that, and that's every single thing you need have to do with it!"

"And that single thing, my dear, is a good deal more than I shall ever do. I am ashamed of myself that he ever should have presumed to write to me."

"But he admired you so much," Connie ventured to suggest.

"Let him admire, then, and hold his peace. Does he suppose I am in such distress for admiration, that I will steal out of the house like a thief or a robber to get admired by a stranger?" The quiet contempt in the young lady's face was more expressive than words.

"Queer that Sue Carter should have had that to bring!" exclaimed Belle, with a laugh. "Ham-an and Mordecai! What would n't she have given to have it herself!"

"Lucky for her she did n't," said Helen. "She would have been sure to go."

"I wish she would n't go on so," said Belle. "She's making herself a perfect laughing-stock among the students."

"I am sure she has a great deal of attention," Connie was surprised into saying.

"Attention! Yes; I would n't thank anybody for that kind of attention," replied Belle.

"Those fellows are a race of reprobates," said

Kate, sitting up straight, and bringing down her small fist with emphasis. "They fawn and flatter, and make a girl think they are half in love with her, and then go away, and cut her up."

"Perhaps they do it for her good," said Helen.

Kate took the allusion, but answered, "No, they don't; for the girl herself is the only person that never knows it."

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"They must be hard up," remarked Kate, who was never known to be short of fun.

"But really, now," said Belle Stanton. "Don't you think it is rather hard for a girl to give up gentlemen's society all the years she is at boarding-school?"

It must be a refreshing draught of gentlemen's society that a girl gets, ogling across the church, flirting handkerchiefs from windows; stealing short walks outside the 'chips,'" observed Grace, scornfully.

" You see, Grace, you have so much society at home, and so many masculine friends and admirers, away from here, that you don't know how to pity these poor creatures that set so high a value on a few glimpses of forbidden joys," remarked Kate.

" Well, what great harm is there in it anyway, if any one wants to do such things?" asked Connie, with a careless air, but really wanting the answer. These were girls she admired, bright, stylish, accustomed to society, and she did not understand why they spoke so contemptuously of pleasures which made half the life of the clique with which she was familiar. Connie was only fifteen, brought up by a gentle, now widowed mother, in a quiet country home ; she had come to school unsophisticated, curious, eager for whatever was new, exciting or pleasant. Unfortunately, the girls who had first laid hold upon her were a rather vain, empty-headed circle. Though her mirror had always given her an agreeable

picture, she had never thought a great deal about her looks; but she had not been in Thornton Hall two weeks, before she had heard every feature of her personal appearance, to eyelashes and finger-nails, fully and freely discussed by her group of associates. It is not strange that the child began to consider herself quite a prodigy of beauty, and the charm of her unconscious, innocent freshness, began to be supplanted by the arts and wiles of an incipient coquette. Hitherto, she had known few people beside family friends and commonplace neighbors, but imagination had made up the deficiency. Now she began to wonder if she was really one of those beauties born for the destruction of mankind.

She had appeared in the streets of Grattan not many times before her pretty face and trim little figure attracted notice, and some of those observing, attentive young gentlemen, never wanting to the vicinity of a Young Ladies' Boarding School, began to test her by little marks of attention. Her intimates made the most of every glance, and talked as if the "Little Beauty," as they dubbed her, scattered darts on every side, wherever she moved. In fact, this set of girls were knit together as a Mutual Flattering So-

society. Every remark which could possibly be twisted into "a compliment," heard by one of them about another, was carefully reported, in the hope of getting as good in return. The "young gentlemen" who were honored with their particular admiration, were the subject of unending discussion. Every scrap of information about them was diligently retailed and talked over, and ingenuity was taxed to bring about accidental encounters, since opportunity for regular acquaintance was entirely wanting.

Connie was getting spoiled; still the modesty and refinement of her mother's character was a constant counter-current to the ideas of these new acquaintances. Her teachers, as yet, she knew afar off; and of the older, more scholarly young ladies she stood nearly as much in awe. For Grace Fanshaw, she had that extravagant adoration a girl of her age is apt to pay to a young lady, three or four years older, who takes her fancy but with her she had no real acquaintance. It was a revelation to her, to find how certain things were regarded by this goddess of hers. She did not half understand it, and so it was quite in earnest that she asked, "What harm?"

The girls looked at each other for an answer, but nobody spoke.

"Nell," said Grace Fanshaw, "it will take you to expound."

Helen had an idea how things were going with Connie Brewster. She had also an idea there was stuff in her too good to be wasted; so she was not sorry to have an opportunity to give her some light. Still, she hardly knew how to go about it. If a woman does not know what is womanly, who can tell her?

"Well, in the first place, Connie, I think it isn't modest for a girl to be courting the notice of strangers, or to allow attentions from gentlemen who are not even acquaintances. It isn't *nice*; a girl isn't respected who does it. Her name is bandied about, and she gets a great deal worse reputation than she really deserves. The very fellows who tempt her into it are the very first to sneer at her for it. They like to flirt with a girl as hard as she will let them; but the farther she lets them go, the less they think of her. You see it is so different here at school from what it is out in the world, where people have a chance really to know each other, and meet in company or at home."

"After all, I think the cheating is the worst of it," interrupted Belle Stanton. "This underhand, sly manœuvring must make anybody feel small."

"That seems a great deal worse in a school like this than it does where you are watched all the time," said Kate. "I should just like to go one term to a school on the catch-me-if-you-can system. See if they didn't have to get up early to get ahead of this child! But it's no fun to play tricks here; because you have to tell of yourself."

"Some girls don't see the 'have to,'" suggested Belle.

"Then they tell lies," remarked Grace, coolly.

"I should think you would miss society, Grace. You have so much at home," said Helen.

"Too much; I never could do anything with study there."

"Well, *I* miss it," said Belle, "I want it; but then I can't have everything; and as long as I am a school-girl I expect to live like one."

"Heroic resolve!" exclaimed Kate, rolling up her eyes. "There's the study bell. Chance to practise all your virtues."

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER..



HERE had been a week of drizzling, suicidal weather, such as only the stoutest hearts can withstand. Nearly every one was either cross or blue, or both. Virginia Raleigh had a hard time with her temper, anyway, and day after day like this was a heavy draught upon it. She felt like a magazine of gunpowder longing for the match.

Virginia was an odd one at Thornton Hall. She had come, utterly unused to girls' society or school ways. She was the daughter of an army officer, bred up in

garrisons and forts, educated, so far, mainly by her accomplished mother. She had by inheritance an imperious nature, was an only child; from her babyhood petted and spoiled, not only by her parents, but her father's whole staff. She loved few, but those ardently, and from them she demanded devotion.

Her striking looks, graceful, unconscious independence and the aroma of an adventurous, out-of-the-way history, had made her, at first, very attractive to her schoolmates, but as they found her extremely indifferent to their good-will, the general feeling towards her became an odd mixture of admiration and dislike. Perhaps dislike is too strong a word; it was rather that feeling of sub-resentment, of hurt self-respect, so natural to us all, when we find our opinions disregarded and our friendship unvalued. "Why should she hold herself aloof? She is no better than the rest of us. There are other girls in the family every way her equal and more."

Meanwhile Miss Raleigh herself neither knew nor cared what sort of place she was making for herself in the regard of her schoolmates. A time was coming when she would care and would keenly feel her loss, but for months after joining

the family at Thornton Hall, her indifference was so genuine that she did not observe any lack of affection towards herself. It was not, as her schoolmates thought, pride only that separated her from them, but rather that their life was so far away from that she had always lived, that she failed to feel any interest in it. When they were chatting busily around her, and thought her silence haughty contempt, she was in fact thousands of miles away, living over scenes far more interesting to her than their talk. A tearful homesickness would have been pitied, but this absenting oneself from one's body is trying to those with whom the body is left. She gave herself heartily to her studies, and with very good success, though it was hard for her to change from the long, easy discursive conversations, which had been her only recitations, to the rapid exact habits of the class-room. Her painting teacher, Miss Lincoln, attracted her strongly, and almost unconsciously gained a very great influence over her. And one schoolmate had broken through the icy walls and forced a passage to her heart—merry Kate Campbell. In the crowd her quick eyes scanned the first evening she supped at Thornton Hall, nothing at-

"I think I see myself doing it," she said, in a tone of quiet contempt, with a slight raising of the eyebrows and curl of the lip.

"What's that?" asked Belle, who was watching her face with an amused air. Somehow that face expressed so much with so little change of its lines that it was always a study to Belle.

"This precious young gentleman hopes I will do myself the honor to meet him by moonlight and skulk down some back lane. I take it that's what it means, is n't it?" giving the note, which had slid to the floor, a little push towards Bellc with the toe of her slipper.

Bell picked it up and read :

"MISS F.,—Pardon the admiration of a stranger, if I beg the favor of your acquaintance. Eight o'clock, Monday evening, head of the Brook path. If you will meet me, please wear a blue ribbon in your hair to church, to-morrow.

"Devotedly, s. v. s."

"Nell Campbell, what have I ever done, that this puppy should presume to send me such a thing as that?" demanded Grace.

At that moment came a rap at the door, and Helen's sister Kate, put in her head.

"What *is* the matter, Grace? You look as if you were holding a coroner's inquest."

"I am disgusted," said Grace. Belle burst out laughing.

"Sam Scranton has been making advances, and Grace feels insulted; that's what's the matter."

She handed over the despised note, which Kate had no sooner run over, than she burst out,

"Oh, do, do, *do*, Grace! Only wear that blue ribbon to please me. It would be such fun to set Cousin Dick on him!" Kate's eyes were sparkling with mischief at the idea of a practical joke.

"What would you do?" asked Constance, eagerly.

"Just let me give Dick his cue, and he would do it up brown. He's very little taller than Grace, and has quite long, brown hair, that would take kindly to a switch; it would take nothing but a girl's hat, dress-skirt and cloak, to make him over, by moonlight. Oh, would n't it be rich!" with a gesture of keen delight. "I think I see Sam Scranton writhe."

"There was a great joke of that kind got off at the seminary where my Cousin Nettie gradu-

ated in the West," said Belle. "One of the young ladies, who was so soft, she thought everybody was in love with her, got a note, one day, from one of the students in the university in the place, professing to be greatly smitten with her. She was mightily pleased, and showed it around among the girls, much to their delight. They put her up to answering it; though she did n't need much urging, I guess. Two or three letters passed, and then he begged for an interview, and proposed that, for safety, they should meet in the engine-house. You see the seminary was heated by steam, and the engine-house was quite a little distance away, with a kind of subterranean passage leading to it. This girl was mortally afraid, but she thought she must meet her admirer at all hazards; so she took one confidential friend with her, and went groping down, in the evening, all expectation—and was greeted by a shout of laughter from half a dozen girls, who had got up the whole performance."

"Poor thing!" said Helen Campbell. "I think it was cruel."

"I don't," cried Kate, with a positive nod of her mischievous head. "It was just good enough for her. If girls will be such geese as to corre-

spond with strangers, they *ought* to suffer for it."

"But to entrap anybody into making a fool of herself, and then taunt her with it, I call mean," persisted Helen.

"You see, she was such a fool to begin with," argued Kate, "that severe remedies were necessary. I think those girls were real benefactors to take her in hand, and teach her a lesson she would n't soon forget."

"And you think you could persuade yourself to do as much for Sam Scranton," laughed Belle.

"Yes," with a deep sigh; "Samuel Scranton might make a worthy young man if he was cured of this weakness; and I feel called upon to undertake his case, whatever it costs me." Getting down on her knees beside Grace, and putting her arms around her, she went on: "Now, you will just wear that pretty blue bow in your bonnie brown hair to-morrow, won't you? That's a love!"

"I should rather think not," said Grace, smiling at her eagerness.

"Now, why won't you?" teased Kate. "You see we can't get him out without that, and that's every single thing you need have to do with it!"

"And that single thing, my dear, is a good deal more than I shall ever do. I am ashamed of myself that he ever should have presumed to write to me."

"But he admired you so much," Connie ventured to suggest.

"Let him admire, then, and hold his peace. Does he suppose I am in such distress for admiration, that I will steal out of the house like a thief or a robber to get admired by a stranger?" The quiet contempt in the young lady's face was more expressive than words.

"Queer that Sue Carter should have had that to bring!" exclaimed Belle, with a laugh. "Haman and Mordecai! What would n't she have given to have it herself!"

"Lucky for her she did n't," said Helen. "She would have been sure to go."

"I wish she wouldn't go on so," said Belle. "She's making herself a perfect laughing-stock among the students."

"I am sure she has a great deal of attention," Connie was surprised into saying.

"Attention! Yes; I would n't thank anybody for that kind of attention," replied Belle.

"Those fellows are a race of reprobates," said

Kate, sitting up straight, and bringing down her small fist with emphasis. "They fawn and flatter, and make a girl think they are half in love with her, and then go away, and cut her up."

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tracted her like that pale face of Virginia Raleigh, with its marked, yet delicate features, and its great mysterious black eyes. The little air of hauteur and reserve only heightened the charm to the light-hearted, out-speaking Kate, and when she had learned something of the adventurous life the interesting stranger had lived, the work was complete. Kate was captivated, and went at the object of her admiration with a vigor which admitted of no resistance. In fact, Virginia was amused and pleased by this new treatment. The frank ardor with which Kate began her acquaintance carried the day. Virginia loved her, petted her, tyrannized over her. Neither of the two knew any happier hours than the twilights when, perched in a sunset window, Virginia regaled Kate with long stories from her own romantic life, to be, in turn, amused and entertained by the eager attention and original comments of her auditor.

But this friendship, which had great delights for Kate, was not without its trials. It was her nature to enjoy life keenly on every side. All her senses were alive to pleasure. She was quick to see, not only all that was comical, but whatever was lovable in people, and her genial soul

radiated like sunshine towards all about her. She made many friends, not so much from that hunger of the heart that craves love, as from that generosity that rejoices in giving it. Now Virginia would allow nothing of this sort. Any one who was going to love her must make a business of it. Being one among an indiscriminate crowd was not at all to her taste. She loved her few friends with passionate intensity, and she demanded the same in return. No love seemed to her real which was not exclusive. It made her unhappy to share Miss Lincoln with so many girls, but that she had to accept, as a dire necessity. All her kindness to her pupils in general she did not mind; indeed, she liked it; but a smile or a caress bestowed by her favorite teacher on one she could consider her own rival, would torment her with all the pangs of jealousy; there was no help for it, however, in that case; but Kate she could rule with a rod of iron, and she did. She felt that she had a right to keep her all to herself.

So you can see it was very irritating, as she sat at her window one of those dismal days, gazing with disgust through the thick air out on the slushy earth and the low dull roof of cloud

which hung for sky, to hear Kate Campbell's voice going to and fro, up and down the hall, past her door, talking in cheerful tones with Alice Hazeltine. They seemed to be having such a social, merry time. Every laugh raised her ire. *She* wanted Kate; she wanted her to read to her while she worked on her mother's birthday present; besides, she wanted her there whether she did anything or not. The disconsolate dripping that pattered petulantly down into the half melted snow suited, yet aggravated her mood. At last she heard Alice saying,—

“Really, I must go!” and Kate reply,—

“Too bad! Good-by, duck!” with a kiss.

Then a tap at her door, and in danced Kate like a burst of sunshine. She fluttered about the room a moment, making little nonsensical remarks, which got no reply, and then settled down on a large writing-desk which stood at Virginia's feet, saying,—

“Don't you want me to read some more of ‘Vanity Fair?’ There's just about time for another chapter before tea.”

“No, I thank you,” icily.

Kate looked up amazed, and saw Virginia with every feature on its dignity, her attention osten-

tatiouly absorbed in her embroidery. What was amiss, she half divined ; but she sprang up and went to the little book-case, saying,—

“ I don’t believe you know your own heart, my dear. Becky Sharp is a good antidote for this doleful weather. Let’s try her !”

“ I ’ll not trouble you,” answered Miss Raleigh, decidedly. “ I don’t require any company, and you had better go where you can find some, more agreeable than mine.”

“ Virgie, what do you mean ?” demanded Kate, hurt and provoked.

Her companion remained silent long enough to give her an awkward feeling, then said with a scornful, reproachful glance of her terrible black eyes,

“ Perhaps your dear ‘ Duck ’ is at liberty again by this time.”

“ Oh, no, she is n’t,” answered Kate, with an innocent manner, but with mischievous pleasure inside. “ She has to practice till supper-time.”

“ And you thought you could make me do in the meantime ! You are very kind, but I decline the honor. If you prefer Alice Hazeltine, very well ; I think I can exist without you.”

“ Pshaw ! Virgie, what nonsense ! Alice Hazel-

tine is a nice girl, and I like her, but you know well enough nobody else begins to be like you, to me."

"I know nothing of the kind," returned Virginia, drawing away from the caress with which Kate would have emphasized her last words. "On the contrary, I see that almost any one will do as well for you. I know nothing about such friendship. Of course, you can take your choice, but you must not expect me to be one of a regiment. *I would have been* the best friend you ever had, but if you prefer others, you can go to them," she added haughtily.

"You are so unreasonable, Virginia!" exclaimed Kate, hotly. "I don't 'prefer others'; you know I don't. I love you with all my heart, and you know it; but I can't be put in a straight-jacket, and not be allowed to speak to any one else."

"I shall not trouble you any further," said Virginia, pale and trembling with passion, her dropped eyelids betraying more pride and anger than most eyes could express.

"Now, don't!" cried poor Kate, in despair; but Virginia closed her lips, like a sphinx, and, except that the hand went automatically to and

fro about its embroidery, she looked as if petrified into a statue of Nemesis.

It was plainly of no use talking ; so Kate went to her own room, thoroughly uncomfortable. She felt Virginia was to be blamed. What right had she to try to manage her so? She ought to be satisfied with what she well knew was given her —dearest love. That, Kate delighted to bestow and continually assured her of; but to be bound, hand and foot, by this friendship, and not permitted to enjoy any one else,—this was too much. On the other hand, Kate's wrath would have required a great deal of nursing to keep it warm. She had a quick sense of justice, but her temper was sweet and kindly, and nothing was more difficult than for her to stay angry. It was enough to make her wretched to have a quarrel with any one, but with Virginia—the desire of her eyes!

She unburdened her heart to her sister after they had gone to bed that night.

“ I would n’t worry about it one bit,” said Helen, after hearing the story. “ You have done nothing wrong, and if she will be so glum without any reason, let her be. You are not to blame.”

“ I might have been a little more patient. Oh,

dear, I cannot bear to have her this way ! When we came out from supper I was close beside her, and she did n't see me, more than if I had been a cat—not so much—she's afraid of cats. If I only did n't love her!" with a little sob.

"Never mind, Katie," said the older sister, soothingly. "She is too fond of you to go on so."

"Oh, no," answered Kate, despairingly. "I know she loves me, and I know she wants me, but she is proud as Lucifer, and she will never speak to me again, never ! I s'pose I am a little goose to care, but I can't help it !" and the poor girl fairly shook the bed with her sobs.

"Well, dear, I rather think you are," said Helen, as she gathered her into her arms and tried to quiet her. "I would n't care for such a friend, 'proud as Lucifer' and touchy as gunpowder. You are better off without her than with her."

"No ! no, no ! She's a blessed old darling. I love the very ground she treads upon. She isn't to blame for her faults. Everybody has spoiled her all her life. She has always had her own way, and she wants it, of course—anybody would—and she's such a queen ! Besides, if she did n't love me, she would n't care."

"Now, Kate, whatever you do, don't you go and sell your soul to Virginia Raleigh. You were never made to tie yourself to anybody's apron-strings. You can't live with only one friend, and it will spoil you if you try. If she can't be satisfied with having anybody so dead-in-love with her as you are, without cutting you off from every other friend you have, let her go, I say."

"But I cannot live without her!"

"Pshaw, child! Yes, you can. Besides, how is she to live without you any better?"

"Oh, that is so different!" and it was; pride was strong as love in Virginia's nature; in Kate's it was quite subordinate.

There was a moment's silence, and when the disconsolate Kate spoke again, she got no answer; so, gradually, she and all her woes sunk into slumber also.

CHAPTER V.

SCHOOL-GIRL FRIENDSHIP.



OR several days, Virginia Raleigh went about with a kind of marble hardness in her face, and passed her late friend, everywhere, without seeming to see her. Even the little acts of common courtesy which Kate offered, she ignored. The girls were asking each other, "What has come over Kate Campbell?" "Had a flare-up with Miss Raleigh—don't speak to each other," was a sufficient answer.

After things had been going on in this way for about a week, Miss Lincoln sent for the two girls

to come to her room one evening, and help her about some writing. She knew nothing of their falling out, and supposed it would be, as usual, a pleasure for them to work together, as well as to help her. She was not long in seeing her mistake, however. Both were fond of her, both wished to be polite in her presence, yet the feud must be respected at all events. When their work required consultation, each was careful to address herself to Miss Lincoln, never to the other. She did all she could to break down the wall and talk them into good humor, but it was a relief to them all, when the bell rang which called Kate to her piano and broke up the awkward situation. The moment she had left them, Miss Lincoln exclaimed,

“Do tell me, Virginia! What is all this about?”

“Oh, it is nothing. I am afraid we made it very disagreeable for you, Miss Lincoln; but, indeed, I could not speak to her.”

“But what has happened? I thought you were sworn friends.”

“I thought so, too, but she prefers other friends.”

“Is that just it?” asked the teacher, a little incredulously.

"Really, Miss Lincoln, I am just as fond of her as ever I was, but she thinks I am 'unreasonable,' and try to keep her in 'a strait-jacket;' and if my love is such a burden to her, I shall certainly keep it to myself, whatever it costs me. If she chooses other friends, I shall not be in the way."

Miss Lincoln knew the two girls well enough to give a shrewd guess at the state of affairs. She asked, "What does she mean by the 'straight-jacket?'"

"Perhaps I am wrong, but when I love any one, I do it with my whole soul. I don't care for any one else, and I must be loved in the same way, if at all. There was nothing I would not have done for Kate Campbell. I was perfectly happy with her, and I would not have cared the snap of my finger, if I never spoke with another one of the girls. Do you wonder, Miss Lincoln, that I could n't bear to have her racing around with everybody and anybody? If she loved me as I did her, she would not want to. So I have given her up. Was it very bad in me?" lifting up her pale face, with a pleading look which was almost a stranger there.

"I don't wonder at it, Virginia; but I am

afraid it *was* rather bad. Do you doubt her love for you, really?"

"No; I suppose not. But she loves so many people," in a tone of disgust.

"And that very thing is lovely in her," said Miss Lincoln. "Isn't it rather selfish for you to wish to gather in all her sunshine and bottle it up for your private consumption? I believe if you had Kate Campbell made over, so that it would be natural for her to set all her heart on one, instead of loving 'so many people,' you would not love her half so well as you do now. She would n't be Kate at all. She is a free, light-hearted, affectionate creature; bred in a great family of brothers and sisters, and this concentrated, exclusive, passionate kind of friendship you demand, is foreign to her nature."

"But it drives me desperate to see her hugging and kissing other girls," exclaimed Virginia, clinching her little white fists.

"Why, Virgie! You are as bad as a jealous lover," said Miss Lincoln, laughing; but Virginia did not laugh. She looked extremely serious. So her friend grew serious also, came and sat down on the lounge beside her, and, taking both hands in hers, said earnestly,

"My dear Virgie, I wish, for your own sake, you could learn to love more generously."

Virginia started a little, and looked up in surprise. She knew she was capable of a great sacrifice for one she loved. Nothing was too precious to give, nothing too hard to do; how could she love "more generously?"

"Care more for the happiness and the good of your loved one than for your own pleasure," Miss Lincoln went on. "Let your friend love whatever is lovely. If you are so happy as to have the first place in her heart, thank God and try to be worthy of it; but do not forbid her letting any one else in at all."

"But I do not ask any more than I give."

"I think you do. You love your friend in the way that is most natural to you; you are not willing that she should do the same. It is your disposition and your habit to let your affections run in a narrow channel, and pour themselves out on a very few. It is just as natural for her to spend her heart on many friends."

"But the narrow channel runs deepest," said Virginia.

"Perhaps; still the canal is not always deeper than the river."

"Oh, Miss Lincoln!" reproachfully.

"No, my dear girl, I do not mean that for you. I know your soul sets deep and strong towards the few you love, but I *do* think, Virginia, it would be a great deal better, a great deal nearer right, if the flow was broader. You cannot be Christ-like while you are utterly indifferent to all but your chosen few. Do not love your dearest friends any less, but love them with an unselfish love that will leave them free and make them better and happier every day. And then besides this, keep a hospitable heart, full of loving kindness towards every one."

"I don't believe that would be possible for me," answered Virginia. "I cannot get up the slightest interest in people generally. In fact, I rather dislike them; they are irksome to me. Of course, they are just as good as I am; a great deal better, it is to be hoped; only, if they will let me alone, I will them."

"But the world was not made on the let-alone principle," replied Miss Lincoln. "He who taught us all to say 'Our Father,' commanded also, 'Love one another.' How He takes this whole, great, wicked, suffering world into his Fatherly heart, and loves it, and trains it, and

takes care of it, even comes Himself, manifest in the flesh, to seek and to save that which was lost! Then for us to shut ourselves up in our narrow, icy walls, and love neither Him nor each other!"

Virginia's heart was touched by the blending of love and indignant sorrow in the face of her friend. She threw her arms around her, saying,

"But He is divine."

"Yes, dear; but we are His offspring, and he meant to teach us how to love. It seems to me a dreadful waste, Virginia, for one to carry a great warm heart, like yours, through life, wrapped up in selfishness and pride. Oh, you don't know, child, what a pitiful need of love and care there is in this world. What a shame to miss all the chances to cheer and bless that might be yours!"

"But I mean to be kind and charitable."

"The gift without the giver is bare.' This great power of loving was given you to warm and brighten many lives, and so surely as you shut it up in selfish bounds, it will turn upon your own heart and consume it. See how jealous and exacting it is already, and if you let selfishness

minister to it, it will grow more so, till it becomes a torment to yourself and those it fastens upon."

"Oh, I would, if I could, but I can't be unselfish," groaned Virginia. "I love papa and mamma, and you and Kate, and one other; and I want you all, all, all, to myself, and I can't care for anybody else."

"The only way for you, darling, is to give your heart to your heavenly Father," said her friend, very tenderly. "Loving God, you would come to love your brother also."

Virginia lifted her eyes, dewy with tears, kissed the lips that had spoken so plain truth to her, and went silently away to her own room.

Three months before, such thoughts as she had been hearing would have been like an unknown tongue to her. She had been bred to cling to her own, defend it to the last, and care for nothing else. Her father's love for her mother was a jealous passion which would hardly suffer an admiring glance from a fellow-officer to rest upon her. Indeed, a duel in which he had punished such an offence with an ugly bullet wound, was among the traditions of her childhood. Her mother had fostered every exclusive and aristocratic tendency in her, and had delighted to

cherish the sort of adoring devotion the child had always felt for herself. Fondness for each other, and honor, according to the military code, made up the only religion known in the family.

The atmosphere in which Virginia found herself at school, was new and strange to her. She heard more of the Bible in three months there, than she had learned in all her life at home. Not only so, but its precepts were continually referred to in the government and training of the school, and in the intercourse of teachers with pupils, as ultimate authority. Miss Lincoln, whom she loved and admired next to her own mother, was deeply religious. Even her mirthful and impulsive friend, Kate, tried to look at things from the Bible point of view, and was conscientious about many things which Virginia had never thought of as having any right or wrong in them. Once she had startled her by suddenly throwing her arms around her, and exclaiming,

“Oh, you darling, if you were only a Christian, I should be the happiest girl alive!” It rather troubled Virginia; she did not like to think anything was wanting to make her all her friend could desire.

So it was that during the six months she had

spent at Thornton Hall, she had, half unconsciously, been getting a new look-out on life. The character of Christ had been growing on her vision, and the sense of contrast between it and her own was becoming painfully strong. She felt that she must indeed be "born again" to be at all like that. On the other hand, she was jealous of her parents' rights. Could these strangers be nearer the truth than they? Yet, deep under that natural and filial feeling lay the consciousness that her first allegiance was due to the Father of Spirits—that not even the example of her parents could absolve her from her personal duty. Her feeling towards them grew more tender and yearning as the conviction strengthened within her, that there was wrong in that fiery, proud, unforgiving spirit of theirs in which she used to glory. So a struggle, of which there was hardly an outward token, had been going on for weeks in her mind. Except her friend, Miss Lincoln, who longed to see the strong elements of her character fused and remoulded in the love of Christ, no one dreamed that she ever thought of religious duty. No one could have guessed that behind that calm, haughty front the soul was listening, day and

night, to the call, "Come unto me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." She did not want to be meek and lowly; and yet, ever since she came into this new home, she had been learning the beauty of self-forgetting love, and feeling it ought to be hers.

She went from the talk with Miss Lincoln, faint at heart, feeling that a crisis had come. She saw more plainly than she wished to, that her plan of life was all wrong—at variance with His who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. She cared only for herself and the very few who made her joy. Even them she loved, as she began to see, with a selfish, exacting passion. Should she go on in her own way, or begin to follow Christ in His way? The test was at hand; should she throw away the only friendship she had found at school, because it would not yield to her will; or should she call Kate back in "meek and lowly" love. It was by no means the first time Virginia had been obliged to give up her own way; but it was the first time in her life she had really tried to give up her own will. It was not so much that she pined for the old love and companionship, as that she knew her course was selfish and

wrong. She saw more clearly than her schoolmates, who had been religiously educated, the contrast between the spirit of "the world" and the spirit of Christ; and she felt she must choose between them, not for this time only, but for all time. *Could* she take for her Master this Saviour who loved us even unto the death, while we were yet enemies? She recalled a verse which had struck her oddly in that morning's reading, for Virginia had taken to reading the Bible of late. "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." Could she ever attain a glimmering spark of love disinterested as that? She buried her face in her hands with a groan— "Oh, God! Create me anew!" It was the first genuine prayer Virginia had ever offered. Instantly came before her Kate's blue eyes, full of wounded love, as she had caught them resting upon her that morning. Perhaps the Heavenly Father answered her through those eyes. "If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross daily and follow me." Those grieved eyes told Virginia plainly enough what cross she must take up, that day, if she would be a disciple of the lowly, loving Saviour.

"I will do it, if it kills me," she said. Hurriedly, as if she feared her strength would fail, if she waited, she seized pencil and paper and dashed off the words:

"DEAR KATE,—Forgive me! Come back to
Your naughty VIRGINIA."

Inbred pride writhed in her heart. "I won't!" she whispered scornfully. "You shall!" said Conscience. "I am meek and lowly in heart," breathed the Blessed One. "I ought and I will!" said the whole of Virginia, and with that she rose up gently, went softly along the hall, slipped her little note under Kate's door and went back. She knew Helen was away and her sister alone, but she did not dream what earnest prayers for her were being poured forth in that solitude. During these days of separation, which had been a time of deep affliction to Kate, her loving soul had relieved itself by pouring out to God the most fervent petitions for her estranged friend. There was no blessing in heaven or on earth that she had not asked for her. Kate's prayers were *sui generis*. If they had come from a less honest or affectionate spirit, they might have been irreverent, they were such a turning inside-out of

her heart with all its miscellaneous contents. But He who made her surely knew how to take her, and somehow or other she was apt to get what she asked for. She was down on her knees pleading importunately that Jesus would give her back her friend, at all events would win her to Himself, when she heard the little missive slide under the door. She sprang upon it, devoured it and threw herself down on her knees again in a transport of joy and gratitude. If her Lord had been tangibly there, smiling down upon her, while she embraced and kissed His feet and blessed and thanked Him, it could hardly have been more real or more delightful to her. She was not at liberty to go to Virginia's room till the next bell, but she did not much care. She wanted first to thank the yet dearer friend who had somehow or other brought about the change. When the bell rang, however, Kate's door was first to fly open; her light feet sped along their old path and she threw herself into Virginia's arms, laughing and crying.

"Kate, I know I am just as selfish and hateful as I can be, but I do mean to try to behave myself, and if you will try me again—"

"Oh, you old blessed!" burst in Kate, "I am

so glad to get you back! Was I very horrid? You knew I was your same Kathleen Mavourneen all the time, didn't you?" All which was interspersed with hugs and kisses.

"You are all right," answered Virginia, "only I was a kind of wicked ogress that wanted to eat you all up."

Kate started back, with a howl of mock terror.

"Oh you need n't be afraid; I've been disenchanted. I may have a paroxysm once in a while, but I don't mean ever to try to eat you up again, little girl."

The next afternoon as a knot of girls were standing at a window of the Seminary Hall debating whether to sally forth into the drizzling weather, or settle down to "domestic bliss" by the register, Grace Fanshaw remarked,—

"So the lovers' quarrel is settled, is it?"

"Yes," answered Helen Campbell; "I am thankful; poor Kate has been in such tribulation. They had n't spoken to each other for a week."

"I do think not speaking is the most childish, unmannly way of showing spite," said Belle Stanton. "I would rather any one would rave at me, any time."

"It was n't Kate's fault," said Helen, quickly.

"She would have spoken, but Old Dominion cut her completely."

"Their fiery, flaming friendship burnt out rather soon, did n't it?" asked Grace. "Love me little, love me long."

"Love me *much* and love me long," quoth Belle.

"May be that's past praying for," said Grace, knotting Belle's scarlet scarf into a becoming turban over her glossy black hair as she talked. "You are not very lovable, you know. These furious friendships the girls get up, do seem to me so silly! I don't know how they do it."

"You stoical, cynical, cold-hearted woman of the world! You could n't," said Belle, flashing a reproachful glance from under her turban.

"Now I like *you* tolerably well," said Grace, looking over Belle's picturesque head at Helen, "but I doubt if I should bow down my head like a bulrush and go moping many days, if you should give me a little slight."

"I'll try it and see," said Helen, amused at the idea of a falling out between them.

"I don't care, say what you like. I love my friends, and I want them to love me," declared Belle.

"So she should love her friends!" laughed Helen, patting her head. "But you don't believe in this dead-in-love, neck-or-nothing friendship, like 'Retta Jones's and Addie Bird's, for instance, any more than we do. Cousin Julia says, at Lakeside, where she is, the girls have what they call 'smashes.' One girl falls in love with another and sends her flowers and confectionery, and all that, without making herself known. At last the smasher finds out the smashee, and either a flaming friendship comes of it or it fizzles out."

"It is simply disgusting," said Grace with her looks, no less than her voice.

"Absurd!" pronounced Belle.

"You know that is a tremendously large school, with a great many city girls in it; it seems to me that they try to make up for the want of gentlemen's society and keep their hand in at flirtation by practicing on each other," said Helen.

"Well, if I was going to fall in love, I would fall in love with a man," said Belle.

As the girls were laughing at her decided announcement, Miss Douglass came down the hall. She was passing the group with a nod and a smile, but Grace called to her,—

"Miss Douglass, we are discussing school-girl friendships; won't you give us your opinion of them?"

"School-girl friendships? I think they are the warmest and strongest and longest friendships you will be likely to find," she answered, stopping beside them and resting her hand on Grace's shoulder, as she spoke.

"You do!" exclaimed Belle, with surprise and pleasure. "I thought everybody laughed at them."

"So far as my observation goes, most of the intimate friendships of middle life, among both men and women, began in college or school."

"There, now, you scoffers! what do you think of that?" demanded Belle of the other two.

"I think it is altogether probable," answered Grace; "but I don't believe these friendships that last were ever of the furious kind, do you, Miss Douglass?"

"Anything that is to last must be founded on fact," was the answer. "It is natural enough that young imagination and the impulse to put forth one's whole power of loving should make school friendships over ardent and adoring; but after all you have a better opportunity to know

each other through and through than you ever could have out in the world ; and where there is real congeniality of character at the centre, it will be likely to hold, even after the glamour fades away."

" But do you like the desperate flirtations the girls sometimes get up ?" asked Helen.

" Indeed I do not ! They are silly and belittling. I like a rational, faithful, generous, tender friendship, that keeps its head on its shoulders and its eyes in its head." And with that she left them.

" Isn't she splendid !" murmured Helen, following her with admiring eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DROOPING HOLLYHOCK.



NE recreation evening, a week or two after Virginia Raleigh's "making up" with Kate, she happened to be at home, when most of the family had gone out to a lecture. She had been reading down in the sitting-room, and was going up to her own floor, when her ear was struck by a loud and exceeding bitter cry from Rose Tucker's room. Rose Tucker was the greatest romp in school. Her large, muscular form, coarse, though healthy skin, and rough ways, made her

so unlike a Rose, that the name Hollyhock, given by some school-mate, clung to her as the more appropriate. She was a rude, blundering creature, always laughing at the wrong times and places, always getting into mischief, but, after all, so good-natured and obliging, nobody could help liking her.

She had a vast amount of surplus strength and crude life chafing within her, which made her ache to be climbing trees or breaking horses on her grandfather's farm, rather than taming herself to the decorum of a young ladies' boarding-school. Hard work and daring play were what her body clamored for and really needed. In the gymnasium, nobody could pull or lift as she could, though she was a behemoth at any nice or agile exercise. In their excursions, she could out-walk and out-climb all the rest. If strength and zeal were needed for any enterprise, Holly was a nóst. Quiet study was intolerable to her, and so was the regularity of school routine. In fact, boarding-school was about as unsuitable a place as could have been invented for the child. But her father was a runner for a New York firm, her mother was dead, her grandmother, who had taken care of her for five years, was now too old

and feeble to bear with her headstrong, boisterous life any longer. Unfortunately, there was no need of her earning her living with her hands, and so Mr. Tucker had put her under Miss Douglass's care, as the best disposition that could be made of her.

She was a fearfully wearying pupil. It seemed to be the rule of her life, schoolward, to do those things she ought not to do, and leave undone those things which she ought to have done. Still, her intentions were of the best, and nothing was easier than to move her to great tears of repentance. So she had been borne with, term after term, with not a little of the charity which hopeth all things, endureth all things.

This was the Rose Tucker who was weeping and wailing, as Miss Raleigh passed her door. Virginia hesitated ; should she go in ? It was no business of hers ; Hollyhock always cried like a boy baby when anything ailed her ; besides, it was not a time when they were allowed to visit each other's rooms. Then she was angry with herself as she detected a feeling of relief at that thought. She knew well enough that her teachers would willingly excuse her for transgressing a school rule to do an act of mercy, and that a

selfish shrinking from troubling herself with another's trouble, had made her catch at the excuse. Rose might be really suffering, her room-mate was away. Another burst of crying decided her, she tapped at the door and went in. There lay the poor Hollyhock, spread abroad on the floor in abject misery, her face hidden in her arms and her shaggy hair hanging around it.

"What is the matter, Holly?" asked Virginia, gently, sinking on her knees beside her, and laying her hand kindly on her shoulder. At the tone and touch of kindness, the weeper fairly bellowed; it was minutes before she was able to sob out,

"Oh, dear! dear! dear! I'm done for now!
I wish I was dead!"

A new convulsion went over her prostrate frame, like a young earthquake. Virginia was nonplussed. It was the first time she had ever attempted consolation, except with her dearest friends. She did not know what to do with this unwieldy heap of distress. However, a feeling of real pity guided her right.

"Tell me all about it, Holly, and you will feel better."

"I didn't do a thing, this time, but put some

gravel in her boots, and she's going to tell on me," moaned Holly.

"Who is 'she?'" asked Virginia, repressing a smile.

"Why, Miry," which signified Almira Dole, Rose's room-mate.

"Oh, well, that's nothing; let her tell, that won't hurt you any. You don't suppose Miss Douglass cares what you do with a little gravel?"

"But, you see," said Holly, raising her red, swollen face, "I've done so *many* things. Miss Douglass told father last vacation she'd try me just this one term more, and if I didn't behave, I couldn't stay any longer. Father will be mad as blazes, and it will break poor grandma'am's heart." At this her forehead knotted up again, the corners of her mouth went down, and great tears rolled down her cheeks like rain.

"But this was nothing, I am sure," said Virginia, encouragingly. "Miss Douglass would n't mind a little thing like this."

"But, you see," answered Holly, in unfeigned humility, "nobody likes to room with me, because I leave my things round so; and somehow, I can't help raising Cain generally; but Miry, she wanted my room, and so I s'pose she thought she could

stan' me for the sake of the room. I don't care ! I can't help plaguing her, she's so awful proper. I don't mean to, but she's so kind o' complacent somehow, I like to knock the wind out of her sails." A glimmer of pleasant recollection shone through Holly's tears. "She threatened to tell on me Friday night, but she did n't. I heard her braggin' she had n't been tardy in retirin' sence she had been in school ; so I could n't help sewin' up her night-gown sleeves for her that night. You see, I put out the light, accidentally, just before she went to put it on, and jumped into bed myself. Such a time as she had !" Holly shook with laughter. "Was n't she fe-ro-cious ! And she tore her sleeves in her hurry, and she thinks so much of her clo'es." Again the recollection revived Holly's spirits, and she burst into a roar. "She was glum as an owl all the next day, and she declared she would n't stan' it, but I begged and promised better fashions, and she said she'd try me jest a week longer, and now I've been and gone and done it. She does aggravate me so ! She's mighty purtic'lar about makin' exceptions, but it's my opinion she neglec's the weightier matters of the law, as Miss Douglass tells about. She ha'n't hardly spoke to me sence

last Friday, and I thought I should like to hear her melojoious voice again, so I jest put a nice sprinkle of sharp little gravel-stones in each boot, when she was hurryin' round, gettin' ready for the lecture. She put 'em on and stamped 'em down. My! didn't she howl though? I guess they pricked her good."

The unjustifiable satisfaction Holly got from this conviction was short-lived. Her tone changed to a pitiful minor as she went on. "But she says she can't and she won't room with me another 'day, and she shall tell Miss Douglass so before she sleeps to-night, and she will do it, too. Nobody wants me, and I shall have to go, nobody knows where. Wow! wow! wow!"

"I do not believe Miss Douglass will send you away for putting stones into Almira Dole's shoes," said Virginia, scornfully.

"Why, 't a'n't that," said Holly, laboring to make herself understood, "but, you see, I'm always actin' like sin. Grandma'am used to say it seemed as if I was possessed sometimes, and I don't know but what I am. I don't set out to do anything bad, but before I know it, I'm head over heels in mischief. Miss Douglass is good as gold; I love her next to mv own grandma'am

Every time she gives me an overhaulin', I think I *will* behave this time, sure as guns; but, first I know, I'm up and at it again, and I s'pose I've most worried her life out of her. Anyhow, she told father she could n't keep me unless I turned over a new leaf. Now, don't you see, if I'm such a plague that nobody will room with me, that's the end on 't? Besides, I've made heaps of exceptions" ("exception" was the technical term for a transgression of school rules). "I didn't mean to," and Hollyhock drooped in despair.

"I know you don't mean anything wrong." Virginia stopped, for she could not help thinking what an unfortunate discrepancy there was between the girl's intentions and her actions.

"Oh, if I could only be with you," Holly suddenly burst out, throwing her powerful arms around her, and laying her tousled head on her shoulder, "I could behave, I know I could; I could do *anything* for you."

Virginia was astounded. She had always looked on Holly rather kindly, amused by her pranks and sometimes touched by her kindness; but it had never entered her head that she was an object of admiration to this rude school-mate. It was a fact, however. Hollyhock was afraid of

her; perhaps that was one secret of the fascination, and she had never ventured to express her distant homage by a word till this unwonted sympathy opened her lips.

"Oh, if you *would* let me come and live with you," she pleaded, "you should n't lift your finger about the room work. I would n't be any trouble; 'deed I would n't. I would be jest as good as gold. Oh, if you would only jest *try* me! I would stan' on my head for you."

Virginia did not clearly see how it would benefit her for Holly to stand on her head. She accepted the good-will, however.

But the idea of taking Holly Tucker for a room mate! She had been pitying the child and wishing she could do something for her, but she was quite taken aback by this suggestion. She was the only young lady in the house rooming alone. The rest were all comfortably paired off and settled for the term, and she knew none of them would wish to part and take such substitutes as stiff, disobliging Almira Dole, and harum-scarum Holly Tucker. She did not see what was to be done.

Rose began again. "I always did 'most worship you. I always stood up for you when

the girls were running you down." Virginia's eyebrows went up an imperceptible degree. "I should be perfectly happy if I could room with you, and I always do better when I'm happy. If you would only jest try me. You may turn me out the first minute I do anything bad."

"But I should not like to have you playing tricks on me."

"I should as soon think of biting my head off," replied Holly, quickly, with a very solemn countenance.

"Then, I like to have my room orderly." Virginia was dainty in her personal habits.

"'Deed, I would keep my things as nice as a pink; see if I wouldn't. I can if I try. Oh, do jist try me!" and again Holly threw her arms around her with a hug that threatened to make an end of her.

"I will think about it," said Virginia.

"*Will* you; 'pon honor? Oh, good on your head!" and the happy girl gave the hand of her comforter a crushing squeeze, as she rose to leave her.

Virginia went slowly to her own room. It looked very bright and pleasant with its neat furniture, the pretty pictures on the walls, a

hanging basket with its trailing vines in the window, choice books on the table, and tasteful trinkets on the bureau, with the soft light of a student lamp over all.

“How could I!” she groaned, as she thought of introducing clumsy Hollyhock Tucker into this dear little retreat. She sank down into her small rocking chair and gazed absently at the shaded light, thinking it all over. To give up her solitude, at all, was a keener sacrifice for her than it would have been probably to any other in the house; and to give it up for such a companion——!

Then she thought how the poor child clung to her; how certain it seemed that she might be a great help and comfort to her; how dreadful to be motherless, and to feel that nobody wants you.

She had been trying, within these last days, to learn the lesson of unselfish love. She hardly dared say it to herself, but she had tried to yield herself to her Saviour’s guidance, and now, as the refrain of all her thoughts, came back the words—“Even Christ pleased not himself,” she leaned her head on the table, and breathed out a fervent prayer. A few minutes longer her

head rested there, full of busy thoughts ; then she said aloud, "I will do it," rose up, and went down to talk with the Principal. She began at once—

"Miss Douglass, would you be willing to have Rose Tucker come and room with me?"

"Rose Tucker! Do you really wish it?" asked Miss Douglass, in astonishment. "I thought you were particularly anxious to room alone?"

"So I was ; but I think ~~she~~ would like to come, and I thought, perhaps, she would do better—that sounds very conceited—but you know, Miss Douglass, I do not mean it so," said Virginia, a little embarrassed.

"And you would be willing to take her for the sake of helping her to do well?"

"If you think it would do."

"My dear child," said Miss Douglass, with a look of surprise and pleasure, "it is a very kind offer, and I am glad you found it in your heart to make it; but perhaps you don't know how much it means."

"I know she is disorderly and a terrible tease ; but I thought, perhaps, she would do better if she could room with me ; she wants it so much," answered Virginia.

"No doubt she would try; but I'm sorry to say her good resolutions are apt to be like the morning cloud and the early dew. She has her very nature to fight against. You had better not undertake it unless you are willing to be severely tried. If you could let her come, and bear with her and help her to do right, remembering she is a motherless child, with a lawless, undisciplined character, it would be a blessed service. I am really very much perplexed about her. She is so constantly going astray, and is doing so poorly in her studies, that it is bad for herself and for the other girls for her to be here. Moreover, Miss Dole told me, this evening, that she could not possibly get along with her as room-mate. I did not suppose it would be best for her to stay much longer, but I should be very sorry to send her away in the middle of the term; it would appear as if she were a worse girl than she is. Still, if she will not behave so that any one can live with her, she must take the consequences."

"But she is such a kind-hearted, well-meaning creature!" Virginia pleaded.

"I know it; but the poor child will have to learn that good intentions will not atone for bad

actions. If Rose is fond of you, and you will take her in, I think you may get a strong influence over her, and do her good, which will last her life long. But I should despair, Virginia, of your doing it without Heavenly aid; one who would help another up needs to keep fast hold of the Redeemer with the other hand."

The softened expression of the dark eyes that glanced up to Miss Douglass's face, and fell again, suggested to her a hope she hardly dared receive.

"Do you ever long for His love?" she asked.

"Indeed I do," replied Virginia, seriously; "but I have been so proud, and selfish, and stubborn, it seems as if I never could be a Christian."

"He is able to subdue all things to Himself," said Miss Douglass, drawing the young girl to her. "If you sincerely want Him to subdue this proud, selfish, stubborn heart of yours, he can and will. Are you willing to have him use whatever discipline He sees it may take, and to do whatever share in the world's work He will give you?"

Virginia thought before answering. She knew how much the question involved better than the questioner, unacquainted with her home. Her

face grew pale to the very lips, but she said at last, out of her deepest consciousness,

“If I am not willing, I am sure that I desire, above all things, to be.”

“God bless and help you, my dear girl,” said the other fervently. “He will. You are ready to be blessed, if you can say that. ‘Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.’ Have n’t you a proof of your own sincerity in this wish to do something for another at your own expense? Would you have done it last autumn?”

“Oh, Miss Douglass, I would n’t have done it three weeks ago! I should have felt that I could not, whatever became of her. I do believe I am a little different.”

“Watch and pray. Abide in Christ—that is the only way to live. Shall we ask his help for you now, in this home missionary enterprise of yours?”

“I should love to have you,” answered Virginia, and the two knelt together while the teacher sought grace from on high for her young friend. Virginia felt as if the answer had begun to come as she rose subdued, yet strengthened in spirit.

“May I go and tell Holly now?” she asked.

"Yes. Of course all I have said of her is confidential."

"Certainly. Good-night and thanks," with a kiss.

"Good-night, and God bless you, dear."

The next morning, to the amazement of all the girls, Hollyhock was seen with a white towel wreathed around her head, bearing load after load of her worldly gear from No. 10 to No. 20, loudly proclaiming that the firm of Dole and Tucker was dissolved, and she was "goin' to the Old Dominion for her 'health.'"

The new combination was the day's talk in the house. Holly's face was radiant as the sun at noonday, her large mouth stretched to its smiling capacity. Miss Dole looked grimly satisfied and triumphant. Miss Raleigh helped Rose cordially to get settled in the room, and told her in a quiet but quite decisive way, where and how she would be expected to keep her things. Perhaps there is nobody, no woman at least, who does not rather enjoy being controlled by somebody, if the right somebody can be found. Virginia Raleigh was the master-spirit that Hollyhock delighted to honor. She greatly admired her, considerably feared her, and altogether loved her. She secretly

gloried in seeing how she could manage her unmanageable self, and so it came about that this room-mate had more power over her than father, "grandma'am," or teacher. Not that she was in any danger of being translated for her goodness; she was the same girl, but she had come under a stronger motive for well-doing than ever before.

As for Virginia, she found it a serious, daily trouble to have a room-mate, and such a one. Her liberty was abridged in a score of little nameless ways; her pleasant visits with Kate interrupted. Holly's uncouth ways offended her taste and tried her disposition and endangered her possessions. The first Sunday they spent together furnished an example.

Virginia valued the afternoon, between church-service and supper, as a long, quiet time to read. A long, quiet time was misery to the Hollyhock; she never liked to read, and Sunday pent up her powers of action painfully. She ranged around the room like a caged leopard; asked questions about this, that and the other; handled and examined everything she could get hold of; ate a half pint of peanuts; piled herself up in a chair at the window, and remarked upon everybody and everything within her ken.

All this was intolerably irritating to her roommate, still she tried to hold on to her temper. One time, when she looked up from her book, nearly desperate with the continual chatter, Holly was amusing herself with her pretty ivory paper-folder, seeing how far she could bend it in her strong hands.

"*Will* you put down my paper-knife, and see if you can keep still five minutes?" asked Virginia, severely. Holly put down the paper-folder and contented herself with drumming on the window-sill. Virginia read on, as well as she could, several minutes. When she raised her eyes again, Holly had the beautiful porcelain picture of her mother, stroking the velvet setting with her heavy fingers.

"Holly Tucker! let that alone, will you!" she cried, so suddenly and sharply that Holly dropped it like a live coal. It fell to the floor and cracked the porcelain. Virginia sprang for it, flashed a fierce glance at Holly, laid the picture carefully in her drawer, locked that, and put the key in her pocket.

"Oh, I'm awful sorry! I didn't mean to! I would n't have hurt it for anything," exclaimed Holly

Virginia vouchsafed no reply. She sat down again in her place, her eyes full of dark fire, her pale cheek flushed, and anger in every line of her face and figure. She took up her book again, but turned no leaves.

Hollyhock began to cry—laid her head on the window-sill and cried harder—got down on the floor, laid her head in the chair, and cried harder yet, but Virginia took no notice.

“She ought to cry. All her crying would n’t make whole the porcelain. Great clumsy bear ! Why could n’t she let alone other people’s things. Poor, dear, mamma ! What a cruel shame to break her lovely picture ! Cry away, it is the best thing you can do ; but what a blubbering piece of business you make of it, you great awkward thing !”

So ran Virginia’s reflections.

“Mercy on me—if I only had n’t ! She never will get over it. She worships that picture. She ’ll hate me after this. Oh, dear ! dear ! dear ! I wish I was dead. I am always breaking or tearing the nicest thing there is. But I did n’t mean to, she knows I did n’t mean to,” was Holly’s unspoken lamentation.

After a long time, Virginia’s wrath held still

long enough to let justice suggest to her that Holly had certainly put a great restraint upon herself to behave as well as she had, since she had been with her. Conscience quietly remarked, "This is a pretty way to help a girl to do better." The tempter sneeringly observed, "This is what your new religion amounts to; bring it to the test."

It was not till late in the evening that she could bring herself to say,

"Holly, I had no right to be so cross with you; you must forgive me."

"Oh, if you only will forgive *me*. I did n't mean to do any harm."

"I know you did n't, and I was just as angry with you as if you had done it on purpose."

So Holly went to sleep comforted. It would have been well if she had drawn from the affair the conclusion that she had better be careful about meddling with precious and frangible things belonging to other people, but Holly-hock was not of a reflective turn.

CHAPTER VII.

RIDE BY MOONLIGHT.



CONNIE BREWSTER was in a bad way. When she first came to school she was a little wild rose; now she was getting her head full of foolish notions, fancying every one was looking at her and admiring her. Her studies, which she had taken hold of bravely the first term, had grown dull to her. Now, though a book was in her hand, her thoughts were busy with every flattering look or word she had got the day before, or planning

what she would wear, and wondering whom she would meet, when she went out to walk.

Her love of approbation was strong, dangerously strong. She liked not only to be called "too sweet to live" by her intimates, and the "prettiest girl on the street," by the students, but she wanted the good opinion of her teachers. However she might protest she "did n't care," she did care, not a little, what they thought of her. She cowered before blame; she loved to be petted, and so she was fast falling into a habit of duplicity.

Self-reporting was the order of the school, but Connie, lacking the courage to report her daily irregularities, tried to persuade herself that black was white, and false was true.

Her once discriminating conscience was getting badly befogged. Twistings of the truth which would have shocked her when she first came from home, were habitual with her now. If her mother could have looked into the heart and life of the darling whom she had sent away from her at so much sacrifice, she would have been struck with dismay. But the child's letters gave no hint of the real life she was living; they talked of what would please her mother, not

what made her own pleasure. Writing those letters, by the way, was a different thing from what it had been at first. Then, Connie was eager for recreation-evening to come, that she might have time to tell her mother everything page after page was filled with the smallest particulars of her life ; now, the letters home were a duty, got through as soon as possible, that she might go and gossip with Sue Carter, or read some limpsy novel which Hort Harvey had lent her. Her far-off mother felt the difference, but persuaded herself that the dear child was studying so hard she must not expect long letters.

Sue Carter, whose natural endowments, both of mind and body, were poor, attached herself to Connie like a burr. She really liked her ; and then, so long as they were bosom friends, all that was Connie's was, in some sense, hers. When she walked the streets, hanging heavily on Connie's arm, they were sure to be noticed, and she did not try to distinguish which drew the attention. She had been badly trained at home. How little Mrs. Carter had dreamed, when she observed to her children, as she had a habit of doing, " You need n't say anything to your father about it," what a drill she was giving them in

deception. The father, as he came down with crushing severity on their faults and follies, fancied he had done *his* duty, and he was not to be blamed if his children would "go to the bad." He never noticed the counsel, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath;" in fact, he seldom went to the Bible for counsel. He had a theory that children ought to mind, and so he often declared his children should mind, if he had to break their backs. They minded accordingly—as long as he was about. Mrs. Carter's cardinal doctrine, on the other hand, generally rounded off by an expressive sigh, was, that young people ought to have a good time while they could. Between the two, it is not strange that the large flock of young Carters were turning out but poorly. Sue's great motive in coming to school had been a desire to get away from her father's chiding eye, while the example of her mother had prepared her to do slyly and cover well whatever she pleased.

None of the teachers could have alleged against Sue Carter any particular transgression; yet all of them felt about her the atmosphere of craft. She was nearly as bad a companion for Connie as could have been found, for "the Little Beauty"

belonged to the large and ill-starred class of the "easily influenced," and while she did not respect nor approve Sue Carter, nor even love her much, she gave herself up to her sway, and fell into her habits of talking and acting. Under Sue's guidance she had made the acquaintance of their street followers, Coggin and Clough, and had twice found an agreeable excitement in a stolen walk with them. The secrecy and misrepresentation which would once have oppressed her ingenuous heart, now heightened the flavor of the stolen waters.

Meanwhile, Connie's school reputation was of course going down—with the pupils faster than with the teachers. When she first came, every one had been saying, "What a sweet little thing!" "What a dear little thing!" "What a bright little thing!" Girls in boarding-school know each other pretty thoroughly, and before any teacher was willing to admit the suspicion that she was acting a double part, remarks like these were common among the young ladies. "How Connie Brewster is getting spoiled!" "I cannot bear her pretty face now, she is such a little hypocrite." "What a shame Little Beauty goes with Sue Carter so much!" "How could Con Brew-

ster have a face to report she hadn't broken study hours, when I saw her with my own eyes reading a novel a whole study-hour this morning?" "Oh, that was what she was studying!" "That would be a fib if I told it," with a shrug.

There was one of the better kind of girls, however, who still took a strong interest in the child. Grace Fanshaw could not but feel that the first Connie, with all her sweet artlessness, was the real Connie. Perhaps it was because the Little Beauty admired her so much, that she showed the best side of her character with her.

She did not get much petting from her, that was not Grace Fanshaw's way, but a bright smile or a friendly word was enough to make her happy for hours.

The girls at Thornton Hall—that was the name of the living house, the home, connected with Grattan Seminary—were allowed to walk by themselves, alone or in groups. Miss Douglass's theory was, that a young lady is better educated when she has learned to regulate herself than when she has merely learned to submit to being regulated. So she liked to throw her girls on their own responsibility, as far as they would bear· to cultivate their consciences and

sense of propriety so that they might be a safe law unto themselves. In general the plan worked well. The public opinion of the school was on the right side. There were so many girls who showed by their daily life that they understood what a woman and a lady should be, that they formed a powerful restraint to the few who were inclined to abuse their liberty. Still, there were always some in school who needed constant care, to whom this style of administration was an injury, presuming upon more honor and truth than they possessed.

Sue Carter and her special associates were the exceptional cases this winter. One January afternoon, as she and Connie were taking their "out-of-doors exercise," they met, by chance, the usual way, Clough and Coggin. It was on a country road a little out of the village. The crisp snow lay sparkling over broad fields, softly rounded over stumps and ragged rocks, and piled in the arms of the hemlocks. The road was two narrow paths made by the sleigh-runners. Saying something about the walking being better on that side, Sue stepped behind Connie, and Clough immediately joined her, while Coggin stepped forward to walk with "Miss Brewster."

‘Oh, you should n’t walk with me; it is very wicked,’ said Connie, rolling her bright eyes up at him in saucy reproof.

“Is it? I must say being wicked is very agreeable, then,” replied the young man. “What a splendid day it is, is n’t it!”

“Perfectly mag—! Dear me! if I was only at home!” The sentence was ended with a suggestive sigh.

“Well, now,” exclaimed Coggin, with elevated eyebrows, “that’s flattering!”

“Oh, I should like you to be there, too,” answered the young girl, frankly, “but, you see, if I was at home, I should be taking a sleigh-ride this evening, instead of digging at that horrid old algebra.”

“I don’t see why that can’t be done as it is,” said Coggin. “Will you go if I will come for you?”

“Oh, would n’t I like it!” exclaimed Connie, hugging her muff to her breast, in a little ecstasy. “But, mercy, me! Miss Douglass would sooner cut my head off than let me go.”

“Very well; what’s the use of troubling her virtuous mind with the appalling proposition? It is none of her business. Time enough for her

to refuse my invitation when I invite her to a sleigh-ride. Would you like to go yourself?"

"*Like* to! It would be perfectly elegant, if I only could!"

"'Course you can. Your dragon doesn't watch you every minute, does she? Where there's a will, there's a way."

"I should n't want to go alone," said Connie, a little shyly.

"Alone! I didn't propose you should, did I?" said the young fellow, looking down at her, with a comical smile.

"Well, you know what I mean," said Connie, blushing. "If Sue would go, I would!"

"Halloo, Clough," called Coggin over his shoulder, "what do you say to taking these young ladies a sleigh-ride to-night?"

"Jolly! will you go?" turning to Miss Carter

"I should like nothing better! What fun it would be!"

"But I don't see how we can, Sue," said Connie, a little anxiously. "Miss Douglass never would forgive us if she found it out."

"She won't find it out. Trust me for that; I'll manage it," replied Sue, with a wag of the head

and a wink of the eye that expressed cunning enough for any emergency.

"We may count upon you, then, may we?" asked Coggin of both.

"Honor bright," replied Sue.

"You don't say," he remarked, looking down into the pretty, wistful, but rather troubled face beside him.

"I want to go awfully," said Connie.

"Come on, then! Who will be the wiser? It will be moonlight, and the sleighing is tip-top. We will have a high old time and be back before lock-up. Don't be afraid," said Coggin.

"But they would hear you come for us."

"It wouldn't do to come clear to the house," replied her companion. "If it wasn't for your confounded old teachers, we would treat you more civilly. As it is, you would have to meet us the other side the grove. If you will do so much, I will guarantee the rest."

"Oh, won't it be fun!" exclaimed Connie, rapturously.

Accepting this oblique sort of compliance, Coggin said, "At eight o'clock, then, just the other side the grove. Clough, we ought to go and engage our teams at once. No pleasure

driving unless you can have a turn-out to suit you."

"Good gracious, Con! Is n't that Miss Hurd coming down the cross-road?" asked Sue Carter. "Of all the tribe, deliver me from her!"

Connie looked across and decided it was Miss Hurd. The two young men fell back and sauntered slowly along, gazing with poetic abstraction at the sunset, which was beginning to flush up in the west, while the two girls walked briskly on to meet Miss Hurd at the crossing. She seemed not to notice them till they were near her, and Sue hastened forward, saying,—

"We thought it was you, Miss Hurd, and so we hurried along to escort you. Too bad the road is n't wide enough for us all! Connie, you will have to go behind, for I am going to walk with Miss Hurd."

The teacher did not exactly believe in this extraordinary gush of affection, but she let them join her, and as she was coming around the corner, homeward, they soon met the two young men, who passed them unconscious and innocent as two lambs.

"Wonder who those fellows are?" exclaimed

Sue. "I noticed them some ways behind us, and I was afraid they would overtake us."

"What if they had?" asked Miss Hurd, with the shadow of a satirical smile.

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think it's nice to meet strangers on these lonely roads, do you?" asked simple Susan.

"It never gave me any trouble" replied Miss Hurd, with a tone that puzzled Sue, it might mean so much or so little.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO GO OR NOT TO GO?



T tea Miss Carter was in high spirits, talking and laughing at the top of her voice ; while Connie, with flushed cheeks and absent-looking eyes, had hard work to eat any supper or give decent attention to the conversation around her. She was excited, eager for the promised pleasure, yet half afraid.

As she passed out of the supper-room, Grace Fanshaw happened next her in the crowd, and, putting her arm around her, took her along with her to her own room.

The lamp was not yet lighted, and, sitting down by the window, she drew Connie into her lap.

"How beautiful!" they both exclaimed, in a breath. The full moon had just risen above the drift of clouds that lay along the horizon, and was smiling down upon it in peaceful triumph. She threw the graceful tracery of the elms on the pure snow, in perfect pencilling, and even the seminary building, ordinary in the daytime, looked massive and grand as its dense shadow lay, clear cut in column and cornice, on the white ground. Both the girls felt the sweet charm of purity and stillness.

"I never dreamed how lovely a winter night in the country might be, till I came here," remarked Grace. "It seems almost a sin to do anything else than look at it."

"Would n't it be splendid to have a sleigh-ride to-night?" said Connie.

"Charming!"

"I have a good mind to tell you something"—"if you won't tell," she was on the point of adding, but was checked by a recollection how Sue's secret had once been spurned in that quarter.

"Say on, little one; I am ready to hear whatever you are ready to tell," said Grace.

Connie hesitated, but she felt just enough disquiet about her project to long to confide it to some one she trusted.

"What should you think if I was to have a sleigh-ride to-night, really?"

"That you were a lucky girl."

"I expect I shall, then," said Connie, looking down, smiling and playing with Grace's necktie.

"You do? Who takes you, pray?"

"Somebody nice—Mr. Coggin."

"And who is Mr. Coggin?"

"Why, don't you know?" asked Connie. "He is a sophomore, and he is *just* as handsome and stylish!" An emphatic gesture completed what words failed to express.

"Should like to see him. How long have you been acquainted with him?"

"Oh, ever so long—much as three weeks. He's perfectly elegant. Won't it be jolly though."

"Just you two going?" asked Grace.

"Oh, no, I would n't go that way," replied the discreet little Miss. "Somebody else is going, too, in another sleigh."

The tone in which all this was communicated, expressed sufficiently that the ride was to be a

stolen pleasure, but Miss Fanshaw remarked, in the most innocent manner,—

“It will be gay, won’t it? But is n’t it a little strange Miss Douglass lets you go?”

“Can’t help herself,” replied Connie, with a shrug. “She need n’t have such horribly strict rules, if she doesn’t want them broken. She will never know anything about it?”

“But won’t you feel a little sneaky, dear, stealing out to take your ride?”

“Oh, well, you know what the Bible says about bread eaten in secret,” was the answer.

“How about reporting?” asked Grace.

“Oh, there will be some way when the time comes. Anyhow, I shall have had my ride, and they can’t get it away.”

“What would your mother think of it, Connie?”

A shade came over the bright young face in the moonlight, but Connie answered,

“Why—I don’t think mother would mind my going to ride.”

“But this way—on the sly?” .

“Why—of course mother wouldn’t like that; but it is only this once, and she never will know it.”

"Now, Sweet-pea," said Grace, taking one of Connie's hands firmly in one of hers, while the other arm was around her waist, "I am going to make a few remarks to you. You need n't get mad, for it will do no good. I shall talk to you as plainly as if you were my own little sister; I wish you were."

After that last, Connie was ready to bear anything.

"It is all very nice to have a sleigh-ride of a moonlight evening, 'specially with a 'perfectly elegant' young gentleman; but this slying off and deceiving your teachers and your mother is *not* nice, and you are not going to do it. At home, in New York, my mother would not think of letting me go to ride with any one I knew as little as you do this fellow, and I should be ashamed to do at school anything I would not dare let my mother know,—and such a mother as yours, Connie!" There was tenderness in Grace's tone as she said that, for she had heard some of Connie's home letters, and she keenly felt how different they were, in their loving care, from the hasty lines, full of dresses, parties and operas which her too worldly mother dashed off to her.

Connie looked rather sober, but said,—

“Mother is all I care for. I don’t care for the teachers, one speck. I should just like to outwit them.”

“Now, it strikes me there is nothing so remarkably cunning in that,” answered Grace. “It would be hard to find a respectable boarding-school where the girls have more freedom than we have here. Any owl can see it would n’t be particularly wise to let all the girls go skylarking ’round with all the students just as they liked. I don’t know how it is with you, but the fact we are depended upon to report ourselves, makes me a great deal more careful than I ever was at home, where we had a monitor or a teacher always watching us. I should think a girl was pretty shabby who would take advantage of it to break rules and then fib about it, should n’t you?”

“Yes, indeed,” replied Connie, mechanically, knowing that was just what she and her friends were continually doing.

“You are too nice a girl to be doing this sort of thing, Sweet-pea.”

Connie kissed Grace’s forehead by way of acknowledgment and said,—

"But, you see, I am in for it?"

"Do you *want* to get out of it?"

"Yes;" said Connie, after a moment's hesitation; "honestly, I wish I had said no; but I didn't think much about it. I only thought what fun it would be."

"Then you shall not go," said Grace, in her quiet, decided manner.

"Oh, but I must," said Connie, starting up with a frightened look. "Sue—the other girl—would be mad as fury, and what would Coggin think?"

"*Let* Sue Carter be mad; it won't hurt anything, and as for Coggin, he knows he had no business to ask you, and if you think better of it, he can't complain. You can send him word."

"Oh, there isn't time. There isn't any way; I shall have to go," said Connie, excitedly. "How I wish I had had sense enough to say no! Mother would feel awfully if she knew it. It was only to-day she wrote how thankful she was, I was doing so well. If I only had said 'no' at the time!"

"How did you expect to get off without its being known?"

"Sue is going to get permission to come to

my room, to have me show her about her algebra examples, and let my room-mate go to her room. Then we can get out of the basement door well enough, and slip out the path through the grove. They will be riding slowly along the road beyond the grove. Dear me!"—she went on, her cheeks burning—"I wish we had never thought of it. I will bet we shall be caught, and they will write to mother about it and there will be an awful time!"

"But you are not going, child," said Grace.

"*I promised.*"

"A bad promise is better broken than kept. If you had only promised to do something that would give you *trouble*, I wouldn't say a word; you ought to keep it; but this thing is wrong and mean, and you sha'n't do it. Just as surely as you undertake it, I will tell Miss Douglass."

"You wouldn't do that!" cried Connie, with a great stare, putting her two hands on Grace's shoulders and looking her fair in the face. "You would n't *tell!*"

"I certainly would, if I could n't stop you in any other way."

If it had been any body else, Connie Brewster would have overwhelmed her with reproaches,

but Grace Fanshaw was so perfectly cool and independent about it, it took away her breath.

"It is what I would do for my own sister, and I would do as much for you," she said.

"*You* would *tell*?" It seemed to Connie incredible that she had heard aright. If there was one thing she feared above all others, it was to be thought a "tell-tale," and here was the young lady she most admired boldly avowing she would tell of her, if she carried out her plan.

"Yes, my dear, just so surely as you attempt to sneak out of this house and steal off to ride in the 'dead hours of night,' with a stranger, I will stop you."

"I should like to know—" Connie began, angrily—

"What right I have to do that?" said Grace, finishing the sentence for her. "None in particular—except that I am your friend. But that I am; and I won't have you cutting up any such ridiculous shines."

If it had been anybody else! But Grace Fanshaw did do things in such a fearless, matter-of-course way, there was no quarreling with her. Besides, clear down at the bottom of her heart, Constance felt rather relieved to have the busi-

ness, which she began to feel was a bad one, taken out of her hands by a stronger will than her own—to have it made impossible to do what she was about to do against her own judgment.

"But the rest of them?" she asked.

"Have the courage to tell Sue Carter that thinking it over, you are not willing to do it."

"Oh, I can't," groaned Connie. "You have no idea what a coward I am. She would never forgive me, never."

"What if she didn't; has she been such a very good friend to you? Tell her, then, if you choose, that it won't be safe for you to do it; that I shall tell Miss Douglass if you do."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that for all the world," answered Connie, in a tone of horror. Sue disliked Grace Fanshaw enough already.

"Well, Connie, you had better go and see her before study hours; persuade her to give up the plan, if you possibly can. If you can't, tell her you shall not go, at any rate."

"But what reason can I give her?" asked the distracted Connie.

"What *is* the reason?"

"Why—partly, that it's wrong and mother wouldn't like it, and, partly, that you won't

"Let me"—pouting—"and that last I can't tell her."

Then bear down on the first, which ought to be enough. Hurry up, Chick, or you won't be in time."

"Dear me! what shall I do?" exclaimed poor Connie, with a groan.

"Do right, dear," said Grace, with a kiss of encouragement. She was so little in the habit of kissing, that when she did, it meant something.

Constance went off to find Sue Carter, and paused a full minute at her door before she gathered courage to knock. She found the young lady standing at her bureau, re-arranging the feathers in her hat, looking complacent and happy. She went slowly up and stood watching her a moment, then burst out,—

"Sue, don't let's go!"

"What—do—you—mean?" demanded Sue, turning upon her and opening her pale grey eyes to the utmost.

"I almost know we shall be found out and get into an awful muss," answered Connie.

"Fiddlestick! you goosey. I'll risk it. I have got through enough tighter places than this all right."

"Then I know mother would feel dreadfully to have me do it," said Connie, coming up a degree in her objections.

"Well, who's going to trouble her about it, I sh'd like to know?" asked Sue, contemptuously.

"But it does seem kind of mean, doing things in this underhand way."

Sue's lips went into a disagreeable sneer.

"Seems to me you're grown 'mazingly squeamish all at once."

Connie never could endure to be laughed at, and she retorted,—

"I don't care; you have got me into mean scrapes enough, and I won't go any further."

Sue looked at her, up and down, deliberately, her whole face one sneer.

"Well done! I should like to know who started this 'scrape.' You don't suppose I saw you cocking up your killing eyes at Coggin and suggesting what a splendid night for a sleigh-ride. Suppose it never occurred to you, little innocent, that he might be tempted to ask you!"

"No, it did n't," returned Connie, honestly too, but irritated past endurance by Sue's insinuation. A scornful grunt of incredulity was Sue's only rejoinder; she went on laying her feathers

and trying on her hat. Connie's blood grew hotter and hotter in the silence. Her vexation with Sue became an additional motive for breaking away from the plan, and enabled her to say much more decidedly than she could have done when she came in,—

“I sha'n't go, any way.”

“Very well; you can do as you like. *I shall keep my engagement.*” The last sentence was so impressively delivered that it made Constance feel like a traitor and a knave, but she rallied presently, with the reflection, which she expressed aloud,—

“It was an engagement we had no right to make.”

“Pity you did n't think of that a little sooner,” retorted Sue, with a scornful laugh.

That was only too true, and Connie had nothing to say to it? Her anger was never malignant nor lasting, however, and she began to think of Sue's going alone to take her drive, and to feel anxious and troubled about it.

“I do wish you would give it up, Sue,” she said. “It won't be nice for you to go alone.”

“Of course it won't,” she replied, with an air of injured virtue, “but if people will back out of

their engagements, I shall have to get along as I can. *I* shall keep my *promise*; you can stay behind and peach, if you want to. I dare say Miss Douglass would make quite a pet of you."

"Sue Carter!" cried Connie, stamping, her eyes blazing, "I won't bear that; you know better."

Sue elevated her eyebrows and tossed her head as if she could n't tell what might not be expected of a girl that failed her friends in this way. The bell rang for study hours, and she said, sullenly,—

"You can do what you like, for all me. I can get along without you, if you can without me."

"All right," said Constance, coldly, turning to go. As she laid her hand on the door-knob, she paused to say,—

"If you see Coggin, tell him—"

"No, you don't," interrupted Sue, decidedly; "you may carry your own messages; I shall have nothing to do with them."

Connie left the room without another word, went to her room, snatched a book from her shelves and went down to the sitting-room, where she was to study at that time. She got into the corner of the room farthest from the

light, leaned her head on her hand and bent over her book in a whirl of contending feelings. She was vexed with Sue, vexed with Grace, vexed with herself, vexed with school restraints, vexed with the world in general.

A chime of sleigh-bells came ringing merrily around the drive, and roused afresh all her desire to go. She parted the curtains beside her and glanced out of the window across the sparkling lawn, marked with a little foot path to the grove. Oh, so free, so bright, so bracing out there! Every pulse in her body begged to go. Her eyes wandered on, and her thoughts, outstripping them, flew over the hills and far away to the cozy little parlor where her sweet-faced mother sat alone, before the grate, thinking of her absent child. The picture restrained her, but her impatient heart cried within her,—“Oh, if there wasn’t any right nor any wrong and nobody cared!” She felt she should like to be an Undine, without any soul. It would be so delicious to do just what you pleased, without any evil coming of it! But Connie had been taught from her childhood up that wrong cannot be done without evil coming of it. This crisis of affairs and this break with her tempter seemed

to bring down upon her the strong tide of mother love and mother teaching. She did not want to feel it, but she could not help it. One moment she was thankful to Grace for taking her ~~a~~ hand, relieved to have broken away from Sue, resolved to turn over a new leaf; the next, possessed by a half-frantic desire to have the pleasure at all hazards—to throw mother's wishes and teachers' authority to the winds and do as she liked.

The instant the bell announced the close of the study-half-hour, a dozen voices broke the silence at once.

"Well, Connie Brewster," said Kate Campbell, who sat opposite, "I hope you have got that page learned; you have n't turned a leaf since you came down. Pray what are you studying at such a rate?" With the words she took the book from her hand to see.

"Mental Philosophy!" she shouted.

"Why, no, it is n't; it is my History," said Connie, trying to get the book back.

"History? Not by a long way!" answered Kate, laughing and pushing away her hand.
"The Absolute Idealists hold that the notion we have of external things is purely subjective—

Oh, see here, girls, isn't Con getting along fast? Here she has been studying her room-mate's Mental Philosophy, all this half hour, and didn't know it! Oh, Con."

The girls "poked fun" at her, on all sides, and she heard Kate, all the way up the stairs, relating, with great gusto, to the girls she met, how Connie Brewster had been learning Mental Philosophy under the impression it was History of the United States.

Grace Fanshaw followed her to her room, for a moment. "Is it all settled? Have you given it all up?"

"I suppose so," answered Connie, rather ungraciously, "but I think it is treating Coggin shamefully. Sue won't take him any message, and I have a good mind to go, at all events, rather than disappoint him."

"Better disappoint him than have your mother disappointed in you," returned Grace. "He knew he made the engagement at a risk, and you can explain it to him afterwards."

Constance looked up in surprise. "I thought you wanted me to cut him entirely."

"So I do; but I want you to do it in a civil way. You are quite as much to blame as he—

more—for all this foolery, and I don't think it would be treating him fairly, to break off all at once without a word. But I wouldn't trust you to speak with him, for fear he would wheedle you out of your senses, you silly little puss. If you will write him in the fewest words you can that the acquaintance must be dropped, I will engage to see the note is sent, in an honorable way."

Connie hesitated; she was not ready to burn her ships behind her.

"Come, Sweet-pea!" said Grace, taking the rosy face between her own soft, white hands. "Be a sensible girl. There is time enough for the beaux after you are through school. Give them up, as long as you are here. You will get to fibbing before you know it."

Connie's eyes drooped. She knew, though she had not yet told an out and out lie with her lips, she was making deception a daily study and progressing rapidly.

"Suppose you turn over a new leaf. I rather think it is time," said Grace with a smile.

"Oh, you splendid! If I was only like you!" exclaimed Connie, with a sudden impulse, throwing her arms around Grace and laying her head on her shoulder.

"Nonsense, child! Be yourself and you will do much better," said Grace, patting her cheek. "I have got leave for you to come to my room, the last hour, and show me that new stitch, will you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"*Au revoir!*" and Grace went away quite happy in feeling that she had kept the child out of mischief. This taking another person's life in hand was a rather new thing to her, but she did nothing by halves and she was determined this pretty, affectionate creature, who clung to her, should not be spoiled, if she could help it.

As eight o'clock approached, Connie turned down her light and seated herself by her window, wondering what Sue Carter would do. Soon she detected a figure all in white, gliding swiftly along the path to the grove.

"Is n't she a case! Who else would have thought of hiding herself in white! Guess she learned that of the rabbits we had in Natural History. What has she got on? Her cloud and her white opera cape and—she can't have on a white dress—I do believe it is just her white skirt with her dress drawn up around her waist! After all, I am glad I am out of it!"

It is to be feared the "Little Beauty" did not study much that evening, but she thought a great deal and thought to good purpose.

The white figure, stealing noiselessly across the snow, had been observed by another, as well. Miss Hurd had just come up to her room and, going to her window to drop the curtain, had noticed it. It looked as if something was wrong. There was no conceivable reason for a woman in white to be going off to the grove, in the frosty evening. Without any very definite reason, she thought at once of Sue Carter. There was always about her that indescribable air of untrustworthiness, which double dealing is so apt to give. Besides, the little encounter of the afternoon, though she had seen nothing out of the way, had struck her unpleasantly. Sue's unusual cordiality could not have been for nothing.

She went immediately to call on Miss Carter. She was not in; her room-mate did not know just where she was; she had taken her books, saying she had a hard lesson to learn and was going to find some place where she could study aloud. Miss Hurd went to the public rooms of the house, but Sue was no where to be seen.

She was on the point of going to Miss Douglass about it, but remembering that she had company she went back to her own room, perplexed and troubled. She was an energetic, quick-witted, compact little person, less popular with the girls, perhaps, than any other teacher. Life had dealt roughly with her, and though she was still young she had encountered so much fraud and meanness, in the world, that she had grown quick, not only to detect evil where it was, but to suspect it where it was not. She was indefatigable in work, faithful and self-sacrificing, and under a rather brusque manner, she carried a warm, true heart. Some of the young ladies had found this out, and were ready to take up the cudgels in her behalf, when others scolded about her and called her "Chief of Police."

Miss Hurd sat down to write a letter, but she could not banish the missing girl from her mind. She was haunted by the idea that she was getting into mischief which ought to be prevented. Suddenly she sprang up, threw on her cloak and hood and started for the grove. It was not far from the house—a pleasant little remnant of forest. It struck Miss Hurd, as she entered its solemn shade from the dazzling whiteness of the

moonlit lawn, that the effect was somewhat weird and awful, but she had a stout heart and laughed at herself for her momentary faltering. A few minutes' search satisfied her, much to her relief, that she was alone there. Wherever that apparition went or whatever it was, it plainly was not Sue Carter going to hold an interview with any body in the grove.

The solemn stillness, the pillared aisles, the strong shadows, making the snowy ground a mosaic of "ebon and ivory," filled the woods with awful beauty, but Miss Hurd had more of the practical than the romantic in her composition, and she did not linger to enjoy the scene. She quickly retraced her steps, and sat down again to her writing, relieved to find her suspicion unfounded, yet reflecting, not unreasonably, that the white figure must have been somebody, going somewhere, also that Miss Carter must be in some place, and was not to be trusted, wherever she was.

Just before the "retiring bell," she went again to Sue's room, and, as she had not yet returned, sat down to talk a while with Sallie Conner, her room-mate, a young lady who minded her own business quite successfully and had very little to

do with any one else. In a few minutes, Sue came in, dressed in dark blue, with no outside wrappings about her.

"Where have you been all the evening, Miss Susy?" asked Miss Hurd. "I have been to see you twice and could not find you."

"You have? I am very sorry." True enough! "I wanted to study aloud, I can learn my French so much better, so I went off alone. I should have asked permission, but I knew Miss Douglass had company and would n't want to be disturbed. I thought she would excuse me."

"So you went——?"

Sue thought fast; she knew Miss Hurd's quick wits and thorough habits; she had no doubt she had been to the public rooms for her; so she said with an innocent face,

"I knew Harty Harvey was practicing almost all the evening, and her room-mate was in the parlor with her father, so I went into their room; was it wrong?" meekly.

"But how cold you are!" said Miss Hurd compassionately, taking hold of her blue-looking hands; "you are actually shivering."

"Oh, I must tell you what a time I have had," said Sue with sudden vivacity. "A few minutes

ago, I missed my bracelet. I think everything of it because mamma gave it to me, Christmas. I thought I must have dropped it in the drive, when I came in from walking ; so I went out and looked. I didn't dare wait till morning for fear somebody would pick it up ; and don't you think, I found it ! " turning the gold circle on her purplish wrist. " Was n't I fortunate ? "

" Very ! " replied Miss Hurd, with a scarcely perceptible accent of incredulity in her voice.

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE MRS. THORNTON'S PARTY.



YOU might have known something extraordinary was going to happen. Such a din of voices in the dining-room, such inscrutable contrivances for hiding crimps and curl-papers! Listen a moment to the table talk.

"Are you going?"
"Suppose I have got to.
Lou declares she won't unless I do." "Poor martyr!" "Are students invited?" "What

are you going to wear?" "Why does n't Lucy Parton go?" "Says she can't spend time."

“Who ever saw the time she could spend? What a dog’s life she leads?” “Do they dance?” “Shall we have anything good to eat?” “Don’t I wish I was old enough to be invited!” “You are welcome to my chance; I hate parties—don’t know how to act.” “Shouldn’t you think Haughty Harvey’s hair would feel horridly, dressed that way?” “What if it does? She would n’t mind hanging a cannon ball to it, if it was fashion. ‘I’m glad Mag McBride has curled her hair.’” “So am I. Doesn’t she look sweet? Wonder if she’s got any thing decent to wear.” “What’s Old Dominion going to wear?” “She never tells.” “Isn’t she queer?” “Queer?—well—yes—kind of splendid though, I think.” “Did you mind her in Geometry, this morning, when Belle Stanton took her up on her demonstration. My! how her eyes flashed.” “No wonder; she was right, ’t was Belle’s mistake.” “I know it, but she need n’t annihilate her if it was. Belle apologized afterward.” “So did Virginia; I heard her.” “Isn’t it funny how Holly Tucker adores her?” “So does Kate Campbell.” “Well, that is n’t strange. Kate likes everybody and everybody likes her; but Holly, such a flibbertigibbet, and Virginia Raleigh is

so—sort of elegant ! It's the queerest match of room-mates, ever I saw." "It is very convenient to have a slave that will run her feet off for you," puts in another. "For shame ! You have no business to say that ; for my part, I think it is going to be the making of Holly, and I believe that 's what Virginia Raleigh took her for." "I would n't thank any body to take me to make." "No danger."

The party was to be given by Mrs. Thornton, a wealthy widow, for whom, as its chief benefactor, Thornton Hall was named. In the lack of children of her own she took Grattan Seminary with all its girls into her heart, and was constantly doing something for its benefit, since, like most schools for girls only, it was in need of all things. She believed in woman's right to be well educated, and meant the bulk of her fortune should go to the improvement of her own sex. Besides making her house a sort of home for the Seminary girls, she treated them every year to a party, taking care to invite such a company as she thought it no disadvantage for girls, away from home, to meet.

After tea there was a general flutter of preparation.

Alice Hazeltine and Maggie McBride had been talking gayly, as they flew about their little room making their toilette. Alice was dressing her hair at the mirror and thinking, Oh, if she was only as beautiful as Belle Stanton, or entertaining as Kate Campbell! when it struck her that Maggie had not spoken for full five minutes. She looked beyond her own reflection in the glass and saw her standing dejectedly, with her dress in one hand, as if she could not make up her mind to put it on.

"What's the matter, Maggie?" she asked, turning round as she put up the last of her braids.

"I don't believe I will go," answered Maggie, mournfully.

"Not go! Why, Maggie Mc! what do you mean? I thought you were keen for it!"

"So I was at first," said Maggie. "I should like to go if I had pretty things to wear, like the rest of you, but this old thing will look so dowdy among all your nice dresses."

Even as she said it, she gave the "old thing" an apologetic stroke, for she remembered well with what loving care her mother had labored over it, cutting over, with much planning and piecing, the old green silk which had been her

best, long before Maggie was born, and how pleased she had looked when she got it done, late the last evening, and said, "There, my dear, now you will be quite presentable."

"No, you won't look dowdy. With your lovely hair, it doesn't make so much difference about the dress. Besides, I know how to brighten you up." Alice quickly opened her jewel box and took out a pretty set of malachite. "There, dear," she said, her face beaming with pleasure, "these will be just the thing to go with your green dress and golden hair!"

"Oh, *no!*" said Maggie, her blue eyes filling with tears. "It's real sweet of you to offer them, but I should n't think of it."

"Why not? They will stay in the box if you don't. I am going to wear my coral, it is so much prettier with my white dress. I would a great deal rather you would wear them than not, Maggie. You never harm anything. Just let me try this on," clasping the bracelet around her plump arm.

Maggie shook her head and unclasped it. "You are just as good as you can be, and the set is lovely but I couldn't wear anything borrowed."

"You didn't ask for it. I *want* you to wear it to please me."

Maggie wavered a moment, then she said, "No, I should feel mean wearing nicer things than I could afford to have myself, just to make me look pretty. I could n't."

Alice turned slowly away and laid the jewelry back in the box.

"I am *just* as thankful to you, Hazie, dear; you know that, don't you?" said Maggie, wistfully, coming up behind and putting a warm kiss on her soft white shoulder.

"I suppose so," answered Alice, with something between a smile and a pout, as she glanced back at the loving, troubled face. "But I am so disappointed; I was going to make you look so pretty."

"Oh, well; never mind! I won't care"—hurrying on the old green silk. "Nobody will mind how I look, if I don't."

A short sharp rap at the door, and in burst Kate Campbell.

"I have come to blow off steam, girls; I am *mad*."

"What's to pay?"

"Would you believe it? Hort Harvey has

been and coaxed poor little Lou Holinshed to give her those flowers she had from her brother this morning."

"Those flowers!" exclaimed Maggie. "Why the poor little thing was kissing them for joy when I was in there!"

"No doubt of it. Her brother is all she has in the world, you know—little, feeble, homesick thing! She was as happy over that box of flowers as if she had found a crock of gold; and then for that great, horrid, heartless Hort Harvey to go and tease away her one little ewe lamb, when her father is worth half a million! It is too abominable." Shut teeth, clinched fist and the sparkle of an indignant tear expressed the rest of Kate's mind.

"How could she!" exclaimed Maggie.

"Just like her," remarked Alice. "She came into Belle Stanton's room, when I was there, before tea, to try to borrow her ivory fan—said she supposed Belle would carry the silk one that matches her dress."

"Did she get it?"

"No; Belle told her it was too delicate to lend. It is very elaborate, you know—one her uncle brought her from India. Hortense went off in quite a pet."

"Good. I am glad Belle Stanton had the independence to refuse her. Most girls would have lent it to her and scolded about it afterwards. If she doesn't know better than to ask for such a thing as that, she ought to be taught. If her father is so rich as she is always bragging, what is she always trying to borrow everything for—from a postage stamp to an ivory fan?"

"I have heard he was, like Barkis, 'a little near,'" said Maggie, whose home was not many miles from the Harveys. "I imagine his children don't have as much to spend as many a poorer man's."

"Then Hortense spends no end of money for confectionery and 'sich,' so she always keeps herself short, and then she doesn't know how to go without anything she wants," said Alice.

"Well, I call it downright dishonesty," declared Kate, with emphasis, "to be always borrowing things, especially if you forget half the time to return them, as she does. I should be ashamed to live on my neighbors so. Her roommate was scolding about it yesterday. She said Hort did n't pretend to buy belt-pins, hair-pins, needles, thread, post-stamps, matches or soap; helps herself out of her stores.

"There! I declare it is great business for me to be retailing all this stuff! I rather think it's time to stop. May be scandal is 'most as bad as borrowing. Say, Alice, don't you want me to tie that sash for you? I'm a connoisseur on bows. Isn't it elegant! This white and coral getting-up is mighty becoming to you. I declare I did n't know you were so good-looking," turning her around and looking at her up and down with an approving smile. "I thought you were going too," she said, suddenly, glancing with surprise at Maggie, who stood by in her plain dark dress, admiring also.

Poor Maggie's cheeks flushed from pink to red, while Alice hastened to say,—

"So she is, to be sure; don't you see she is almost ready?" darting a reproachful look at Kate.

"Why to be sure! How stupid of me!" said Kate, dreadfully sorry for her blunder, and trying to heal the wound. "She has been moving around here, looking sweet and placid as a May flower, so that I did n't realize she was getting ready at all. When I am going any where, I tear around like a young tornado. Father says when I get out of the house, the silence is quite stunning—such a reaction. Bless me! I must

begin to 'tear' if I am going to-night; but you see I was so exercised in spirit I couldn't do anything till I cooled off a little. Besides, there is n't room enough in our humble apartment for Helen and me to dress at the same time. Generally, she hangs me up in the closet, while she gets on that long train of hers, but I thought I would rather come in here. Oh, say! I've been trying to make Grace Fanshaw wear a perfectly gorgeous party dress she's got in the top of her trunk, and she won't."

"Why not?" "What is it?" asked the two together.

"It's a pale blue silk with a tulle overskirt, and no end of trimming—just exquisite! and so becoming to her style! I tell you, she'd be a spectacle for angels and men. But she says, in her cool way, that her gingham morning dress would be quite as suitable to wear to a school-girls' party in Grattan. If we don't have much chance to see the pomps and vanities in this calm retreat, all the more reason our longing eyes should be treated with something nice once in a while, I say."

"I think it is very sensible of her to dress according to the place she is in," said Alice.

"I suppose so," sighed Kate. "Sense is an awful extinguisher of my desires."

"What did she bring it for if she doesn't want to wear it?" asked the practical Maggie.

"Oh, she didn't consider what a 'neat but not gaudy' community she was coming into, I suppose. Besides, her mother put it in. I fancy she thinks more of such things than Grace does. She was dressed within an inch of her life when I saw her. Dear me! there you are getting out your gloves and handkerchief, and I have n't begun. I must rush or

‘Cruel Fate, unkind,
Will take you, fore, and leave I, hind.’"

With that she dashed off, up the stairs, and was heard rushing along the hall above.

"What a child she is!" exclaimed Alice, laughing. "She always talks till the last minute, then rushes around and comes up, panting, a little behind time."

"I know it; but I think she is just as nice as she can be," said Maggie, who had not failed to notice how kindly Kate had tried to undo her mortification.

CHAPTER X.

AFTER MRS. THORNTON'S PARTY.



HE party was over, and as the young ladies came home they turned rather naturally into Miss Douglass's room, where Miss Atherton, one of the teachers, was waiting for them, to talk it all over. It was a cheerful, homelike room, where they knew they were quite welcome. One of Miss Douglass's best qualifications for her place was the motherly element in her nature; she took hearty pleasure in seeing her girls happy and sharing their life. All manner of

confidences and consultations had that open fire witnessed between the principal in her arm-chair and the young girl on the hassock at her feet.

It was a pleasant scene, this free and easy reunion after the party—the crowd of pretty young creatures, standing, sitting, kneeling, crouching on the carpet, wrappings half off, misty cloudlets of worsted around their heads, their bright dresses mingled in gay confusion. There was a general chatter of voices.

“Did you have a good time?” “Were n’t the flowers splendid?” “What a lovely old house!” “Is n’t Mrs. Thornton perfectly mag.?” “What?” “Magnificent, I beg your pardon, Miss Douglass.” “Who were you introduced to?” “Oh, lots!” Alas, for the Queen’s English at the mercy of school-girls!

“Oh, say, did you see that Mr. Jones? Queerest looking creature!”

“What did you introduce that ponderous Mr. Brown to me for? Thought I never should have got rid of him.”

“I am sure I paid for it afterwards, introducing Mr. Fulton to you, when I wanted awfully to keep him myself.”

"Why did n't you, then? I would n't have you sacrifice yourself for me."

"Well, you see, I shrewdly suspected he was getting tired of me."

"Did you have a good time, Miss Douglass?" asked Belle Stanton, who was leaning on the back of her chair.

"Very," answered Miss Douglass, looking up at her and thinking she was a picture to charm the heart of an artist. "What an admirable hostess Mrs. Thornton is! It is a difficult company to manage, so many strangers are brought together—many of them young people who have n't been into company much; but she takes care in an easy, graceful way to see that everybody is introduced to somebody at once, and then that no one gets stranded out of the current of conversation."

"Well, Miss Douglass," said one of the girls, "I am perfectly helpless unless the hostess or somebody else comes to the rescue. Within three minutes after I am introduced to a gentleman, I am distracted with the feeling that he is impatient to get away from me; yet, if I try to break it up, I am afraid he will think I am tired of him. So I go on and on, like the mill that

grinds salt in the sea; if some outsider didn't interfere, I should keep one victim all the evening. That is one reason I didn't want to go to-night."

"And that is one reason I wanted to have you go," said Miss Douglass, laughing. "I want you to learn to manage all these little things and be happy and make others happy in society. When you have talked with one person long enough, don't be afraid to propose introducing him to some friend; only put it in such a way it will not seem as if you were impatient to change. It only requires a little tact."

"That is just what I haven't; mother always said so," ruefully.

"It can be cultivated," said Miss Douglass, smiling at her frankness. "Only have the kind heart, 'through constant watching wise.'"

Just then came a tap at the door, and Kate Campbell appeared. She sprang into the room and sank down on a sofa, shaking with laughter.

"What is it?" "What *are* you laughing at?" asked one and another.

"Oh, I have had the most ridiculous time! There was a man—a little man"—here she went off laughing again, so hard that it set all the rest

at it, without knowing what they were laughing at—"this little man was introduced to me just the last of the evening. I don't know what his name was—it sounded like Belshazzar, may be it was. About the second thing he said was to ask if he 'might wait home on me.' I assure you I seized on the offer, for I had begun to be mortally afraid I was to be left an unprotected female. I'd seen friend after friend go out on the arm of some nice young man, while I was left 'anxious and aimless.' So you see, as soon as I had captured my prize, I thought it would be safest to make off with it. Almost everybody was gone then, so I blandly remarked, perhaps we had better take leave at once. When I had got my things on and came out of the dressing-room, he was standing in the door of the gentlemen's dressing-room, looking straight at me. I glode gracefully down stairs, supposing he was after me; imagine my dismay, when I got to the hall door and looked where he was, to find he was n't there !

"I wasn't going to let him escape me so. I resolved to return. I murmured that I had left something—had n't I, though? I ran upstairs. There he stood, like a graven image, in the very

same tracks. I felt anxious about that youth. I smiled at him. A dubious expression flitted over his features. He peered wildly into the ladies' dressing-room. I was convinced the poor creature did n't know me. All my 'endearing young charms' were concealed in a waterproof and hat. I could n't say, 'My dear Mr. Belshazzar, I am the girl,' because I was n't *sure* that was his name. I went back into the dressing-room and set up my hat so as to show more of my interesting countenance, and let my waterproof off my shoulder, like a Spanish cavalier. Then I sallied forth again. The poor man had begun to look distracted, for nearly everybody was gone. I looked hard at him, kind of nodded and sweetly remarked, 'I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long.' You ought to have seen that man's face! So relieved! 'Oh,' said he, 'is this Miss Cannon?' Though I was n't a cannon, I wanted to go off, so I claimed him and sailed away in triumph."

Kate related her tale with such a tragico-comic air, that the whole circle were convulsed with laughter.

"What in the world did you wrap yourself in that great waterproof for?" asked Helen, as soon

as she could speak. "Much as ever, your own father would know you in it."

"Helen, how can you? You well know my trunk is in the baggage room, and I had no time to get it out,"—with a comical look at Alice and Maggie. "I could n't wear my sack over these beauteous puffed sleeves, and what was I to do?"

"What beautiful flowers you have in your hair, Miss Hortense!" remarked Miss Atherton.

"Yes, a friend gave them to me just in time. Are n't they lovely?" replied Miss Harvey, complacently. Some of the girls exchanged contemptuous glances, thinking of poor little Lou.

"Did you enjoy your evening?" Miss Atherton asked her.

"Oh, yes, I had a splendid time," replied Hortense, but without much heart in her voice. In fact, she had been rather disappointed of the impression she expected to make. She did not understand it; she had regular features, brilliant color, dressed in the extreme of fashion—how was it people always seemed to get tired of her so soon?

"And you, Miss Carter?" asked the Principal.
"Why—no—Miss Douglass, I had a horridly

stupid time. That tiresome Mr. Miller staid with me half the evening."

"Mr. Miller!" exclaimed Helen Campbell.
"Why, I thought he was very interesting."

"I presume he would be to you," said Susie.
"He is too deep for me."

"What a queer piece that Mr. Stone is!" exclaimed one.

"I know it! Homely as a hedge-fence, but I liked him, he is so jolly."

"Wasn't the supper nice? Who was that took you out, Alice?"

"A Mr. Stuart; he was delightful, too;—so polite and attentive about every little thing, without being soft one bit."

"That's so; I liked him *ever* so much," said Florence Hare. "I tell you what, I am going to read the newspapers. I felt like a great ignoramus, everybody I talked with."

"I'm with you, Sister Hare," exclaimed another. "Newspapers? Books, too. Men don't read these stories we do, seems to me. I felt like a gosling talking with Professor Buckingham. I perfectly admire him, but I knew he must pity me, I was so stupid."

"Did you enjoy it, little Mc?" asked Belle

Stanton of Maggie McBride, putting her hand under her chin and tipping up her fair face and listening eyes towards her.

"Oh, yes; the pictures and flowers were so beautiful, and then your brother was so good to me. He staid and entertained me ever so long, when there are so many that want to see him."

"I am glad John could be there," said Belle with a pleased smile. He had come out from the neighboring city, just for the evening.

"Isn't he splendid!" "I should think you would be proud of him!" exclaimed the girls.

"He is a gentleman, and, what is more, you can't help feeling he is a *man*," said Grace Fanshaw.

"Belle Stanton, who was that handsome fellow, gallivanting you around so much?" demanded Helen Campbell.

"Oh! I know," said Hortense Harvey. "That's Ned Carleton. Better be careful Belle," she added rather maliciously. "They say he is rather fast."

"I don't care," retorted Belle, with an independent toss of her shapely head, "he is amazingly agreeable."

"I don't think it is anything against a young

man to be a little fast," said Florence Hare. "I like them all the better for it."

"Oh, don't say that!" exclaimed Miss Atherton with a shudder; anxiety about the "fast" habits of her only brother was the burden on her heart by night and day.

"But, really, Miss Douglass," asked Belle, "do you think a man is really any the worse, in the end, for being a little wild in his youth? Don't you think almost all our smartest men have been so, once?"

The young faces turned eagerly towards Miss Douglass as if Belle had spoken for them all. She noticed it and so answered quite fully.

"I think high spirits and plenty of vitality are grand gifts to begin life with, and so far as wildness comes of these, it comes of what may work up into a fine character.

"But a great many young men are 'fast' because they have not mind enough to study, or force enough to work—decision enough to do right, or because they have a taste for what is really low and bad. You, girls, don't realize how easily these habits you call, 'a little wild,' run into actual vice which you would despise, if you saw it separated from brilliant associations. You

only see the jaunty dress, the fast driving, the free and easy air; and that is all very taking; but if you could just follow one of your 'fast' heroes through twenty-four hours of his life, and see and hear all that goes on in it, you would be disgusted, you would never want him to come near you again. Many and many of these men you speak of, who have come out all right, would give a fortune if they could buy a pure youth. I think girls do more harm than they have any idea of," she went on earnestly, "by this way of feeling and talking, as if a turn for dissipation was a sign of smartness. What a reward for a young fellow who is fighting hard to resist evil and live a pure life, if he finds women would think more of him if he just took a roll in the dirt! Shame on us! We ought to demand that men should be without reproach as much as without fear."

"But I didn't mean really *bad*, you know, Miss Douglass," said Belle.

"I know, dear. But you must be careful not to confound black and white."

"Did you say you thought high spirits were a grand thing to have, Miss Douglass," asked one of the girls whose mirthfulness was always

breaking out in the wrong place. "Why, my high spirits are my greatest grief."

"Yes, I do think fine animal spirits and a sense of the ludicrous, too, are blessings to thank God for. There is a deal of trouble to be borne and work to be done before one gets through life, and a merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

At the same hour, a conclave of young men were discussing the evening also, in one of the college rooms.

"Who was that girl with a half bushel of hair on her head, you were parading around with, Smith?" asked one.

"A Miss Hervey or Harvey, I believe," answered Smith. "Wasn't she got up regardless, though!"

"Oh, I was introduced to her, and thanked my stars for a quick deliverance," remarked a third.

"Why, what ails her?"

"Lay-figure; millinery-stand," was the laconic reply.

"I say, fellows, what made you all fight shy of me, when I tried to dispose of that appendage I lugged round, all the first of the evening?" asked Miller.

"What, that Carter girl?" asked Jack Stone, with a shrug. "See a plenty of her, in the street. I saw Quibblus enjoying her society, afterwards. She's about to his taste. Who was that tall, rather fine-looking young lady, you were talking with, afterwards, in the Library door, Miller."

"Oh, that's a Miss Campbell. Had a good talk with her—fine girl—quite intellectual."

"Bet I'll look out for her, then," exclaimed Jack Stone with a shrug. "Deliver me from intellectual women. They ask you too many conundrums."

"Miss Campbell—tall—fine—intellectual! I must say you are mightily mistaken," exclaimed Fulton, "She's the jolliest little concern I've seen in a long time. I promenaded all over the house with her, and, I tell you, she's a trump. She don't bother her head with books over much, I'll warrant! Full of fun."

"Don't fight, boys," said Ned Carleton, "there are two of 'em. Capital girls, too, each in her own way."

"See here, Carleton, ain't you rather sweet on that handsome Miss Stanton?" asked Fulton, turning upon him suddenly.

"Ain't she handsome, though!" exclaimed Jack Stone, smacking his lips. "My stars, what a mouth!"

"Shut up!" said Ned, with more decision than elegance. "That's no way to treat any lady; besides she is as nice as she is pretty."

"*Procul, o procul este profani!*!" exclaimed Jack, deliberately, elevating his eyebrows; "seems to me we are getting on rather fast, a'n't we! Too good for common folks to talk about a'ready?"

"I tell you, I liked that one with her hair put up in a kind of crown," said Miller, with a descriptive gesture, "and some kind of a lace thing down here," marking out a square neck on his black coat. "She puts a fellow at his ease. I was gawky enough to step on her dress, and instead of looking 'Brute!' at me, she went ahead, talking so pleasantly, I had no chance to be mortified."

"Gawky, mortified!" exclaimed Jack Stone. "It gives me pleasure to step on their trails. If they will have them dragging all over the floor, they must take the consequences. A man must have some place to stand. I know who you mean though. It's a Miss Fanshaw, from New York. She's a lady;—heiress too, they say."

"How Stuart went in, did n't he?" said Carleton. "I never should have thought he was a lady's man. See him in class-room."

"Got lots of sisters," explained Fulton. "Look here! Did you know that Miss Raleigh, with the tremendous eyes, was General Raleigh's daughter?"

"No! Is that so?" "How she sings!" "Splendid looking girl—not handsome, exactly, but what is it they call it?" said Jack Stone. "Distinct—gay!"

"That's it, Jack," said Ned. "Hit it that time. What is she to talk with?"

"Tip-top," replied Jack, elegantly. "I tell you a fellow might as well 'give up and come down' if she treed him."

And so they went on, making comments which our friends at Thornton Hall would have listened to with every degree of pleasure or chagrin.

CHAPTER XI.

A DAY OF RECKONING.



OME o' your folks come pretty nigh gettin' into trouble down our way the other evening, did n't they?" asked Mr. Briggs of the matron, Mrs. Clark, as he was warming his hands by the kitchen range, after delivering a load of wood.

"Ah! how was that?" asked Mrs. Clark.

"Don't you know? Well, p'raps they wanted to keep dark, but they had n't no business

to if they did. I told Miss Briggs I did n't exactly like the looks of things at the time. Why

it was two weeks ago come Friday, wa'n't it? No," said Mr. Briggs, meditatively, "it must ha' been a Thursday, because I had been a repairin' the corn-barn, and I was a settin' readin' my *Democrat*, and that comes a Thursday. Yes, it must ha' been two weeks come Thursday. I was a settin' by the kitchen fire—it was one of them cold days, you remember. Squire Hines, he always keeps the run of the weather, he says this last snap is the hardest, by the thermometer, we have had any January this ten years. I heard some sleigh-bells come jinglin' along quite lively, and all to once they stopped, out in front of our house. We cal'clated somebody had come, and Marthy Jane she flew round, gettin' a lamp to carry into the front room; we always call it the front room, though Miss Briggs, she says 'ta'n't no more front than the kitchen is; it runs right along, you know, the L does, facin' the road. I like it; it's kind o' handy; but Miss Briggs she don't seem to; I tell her she's proud, and don't like to have folks ketch her at her work as they go by; but I tell her housework's honest business, and she hadn't ought 'o be ashamed on't. There was such a tremendous whoain' out the door though, I thought there must be some-

thin' to pay, so I ketched my hat and went out, and there was a young feller and his girl settin' in one of them little stuck-up cutters. I tell 'em they look as if they was made for jest such a purpose ; they 're so narrer they bring folks into dreadful close quarters, and they 're so high folks ought to feel pretty well set up to like 'em. You see this feller's horse was dancin' away at the end of the lines ; he was hangin' onto them and hollerin' 'Whoa!' like a good feller. Ye see the wippletree bolt was broke ; so all he had to keep soul and body together, as it ware, was the lines. His beast had broke one of the fills tramplin round, but we managed to tie it up, and find an old king-bolt to hold things together ; and after a while we got him in runnin' order. I thought the girl would ha' froze, but we could n't get her to come in and set by the fire, best we could do. Miss Briggs she come out and asked her, but 'No—she wa'n't cold at all,' and I could a'most hear her teeth chatter. Why, 'twas that girl—I don't know what her name is—but it 's that girl that sets right behind you in meetin'—wears a rooster tale or someth'n' of the kind on her head. I see her flauntin round 'most every time I come up to the post-office. The team was from Joe

Miller's—that roan mare. Ye see there's a kind o' 'thank-ye-ma'am' just at the foot of the hill, there by our house, and they was comin' down, pretty smart trot, and goin' over this little hummock kind o' sudden, the bolt give way. Joe Miller always lets his things run till they break. I tell my boys an ounce of prevention's worth a pound o' cure."

"That's so," replied Mrs. Clark. "Do you know who the young man was?"

"One the students, 's all I know. I can tell 'em far as I can see 'em. Marthy Jane, she brought the lantern to the barn, she says she's seen him round with a feller named Coggin. Guess he a'n't much account, any way, by the way he swore while we was huntin' round the barn for somethin' to rig him up with. I told him, says I, 'Young man,' says I, 'I'll do what I can to set you agoin' and welcome, but you'll 'bleege me by jest stoppin' that kind o' jaw.' He grumbled a little, but he shet up, on that. Well, I sha'n't get round if I don't start. Good day!" and Mr. Briggs drew on his mittens and departed, quite unconscious what bearing his conversation was likely to have on the fortunes of a certain damsel, at that moment curling her fore-

lock over a slate pencil, in a certain apartment of the third story.

Among Mrs. Clark's good qualities for the varied duties of matron, was the high endowment of knowing when to speak and when to be silent. She was discreet without being timid, a faithful friend at once of the administration and of the girls. She felt that the scrap of information, which had come to her in this incidental way, ought to be known to the Principal, and, saying nothing of it to any one else, she reported it to her. Miss Douglass was already acquainted with Miss Hurd's observations of "a week come Thursday" evening; it was only too easy to put the two things together.

In the course of that evening Miss Carter received word that Miss Douglass wished to see her in her room. It was not a welcome summons, but poor Sue put on a smooth face and went down, resolved to lie it through. That was not so easy, however. Miss Douglass seemed to be inconveniently well informed on her proceedings. Finally she made a virtue of necessity, and freely confessed, with much self-upbraiding, all which she was certain Miss Douglass already knew. Then, somehow, everything which was

known seemed to be a hook wherewith to drag out something else, till, by the time the Principal was through with her, she had the chagrin of feeling that nearly all her careful concealments were ripped open. In vain she insinuated that she was no worse than other girls; she was pinned down to her own misdeeds and forced to convict herself with her own lies. She felt, with secret dismay, that she had fallen into new hands. Here was neither the rash harshness of her father nor the weak credulity of her mother. Miss Douglass was not quick to suspect, but she was clear-headed, persistent and decided, possessed of a strong sense of justice as well as a large, warm heart.

After the investigation was over, and Sue's school-life pretty thoroughly sifted, and a very serious, earnest admonition had been given her, the culprit began to breathe more easily. She had come down quaking at the idea of immediate expulsion.

"It's nothing much, after all," she was saying to herself, when Miss Douglass remarked,—

"You know, of course, you have forfeited your place in school." Sue gasped. "Our family is intended only for those who are willing to com-

ply with its regulations. With our self-reporting system, we should do wrong to keep any scholar whom we knew to be in the daily habit of falsehood." With a face of terror, Sue opened her mouth to plead, but the Principal went on, without giving her an opportunity,—"If I really believed you would begin an entirely different life among us, I should be willing to give you another trial." Protestations flew to Sue's lips, but taking them for granted, Miss Douglass continued in the same low, clear voice,—"It would be very hard, perhaps impossible, for you to do that, however. You have formed acquaintances which would have to be dropped; you have become so accustomed to double dealing, I suppose you would hardly know how to be true."

"Only try me, Miss Douglass," begged Susie, importunately, for her heart quailed at the idea of being sent home in disgrace. "Indeed, I will be a different girl! You never shall have one atom of trouble with me, if you will only try me. I could n't go home! Oh, I could n't go home! It would break my mother's heart if you should send me home!"

"But, I am afraid, instead of giving up your

naughty ways, you would be tempted only to be more sly than ever about them."

"Oh, no, Miss Douglass, I have seen enough of that. Upon honor, I will tell you every single thing I do, though I am sure I sha'n't do anything."

Miss Douglass suppressed a smile at the form of the promise, and accepted its import, saying,—

"I will try you, Susie, the rest of this term; with the distinct understanding that if you transgress again as you have been doing, you will be summarily dismissed from school. I shall write your father to that effect."

"Oh, *please* don't do that, Miss Douglass," implored Sue, in new alarm, seizing the teacher's hand in the earnestness of entreaty. "Anything but that! I don't know what my father would do to me! I cannot have him know about it! He always thinks whatever I do is awful. Oh, *please* don't write to him! I will do anything, bear anything you say, if you only will not write to them at home."

"I must, Susie," said Miss Douglass, folding her other hand kindly over that grasping hers. "You are their child, and it is their right to know how you are doing. Besides, if you should

fail on your trial, it would not be right to send you home without their having the same warning which you have had."

"But I *won't* fail! Anyhow,"—as she saw Miss Douglass's face was not sanguine,—“if any letter must be written, won't you write to mother? Oh, you don't know my father! He will be frightfully angry.”

Miss Douglass thought a moment very seriously. She pitied the girl, and she blamed the father that this should be her only thought of him, but, thinking it over, she could only return to her first decision.

“I think it is the only way, Susie. I will write to them both together. You must give them so much reason to be pleased with you hereafter, as to make them forget this. The fruits of wrongdoing are always bitter, Susie. We have to accept that if we go astray.”

Sue wept and promised and begged, but this decision was final. The letter went in the next mail, kindly but plainly stating the course of disobedience and deception the child had pursued at school, and stating distinctly that thorough reform was the only condition of her remaining.

After all, this overhauling was not the worst thing that could have happened to Sue Carter. It was good for her, to feel, upon her life, the firm kindly grasp of one who was neither to be exasperated nor cajoled. Her career was set before her in a light so strong, that she could not help getting a glimmering idea that cheating was a mean, unprofitable way of getting along. On the other hand, Miss Douglass was filled with pity and concern to see how wretched the girl's home training had been, how dim her conscience was, how low and poor her notions of duty. So that, after it all, the Principal, who had always looked upon Susy as a vain, unreliable, dull, indolent girl, and Susy, who had always looked upon the Principal as the chief foe of her chosen pursuits, were better friends than they had ever been before.

Return of mail brought Susy the first letter she had ever received in her father's hand. A single sentence will show the drift of it. After giving the substance of Miss Douglass's letter, he went on,

"So this is what I have been spending my money for, to support you, away from home, while you are making yourself a disgrace to the

family. Don't dare to call yourself a child or mine, unless you can behave decently among strangers, etc., etc."

There was a postscript from the mother:

" You have driven me half distracted. Do be careful. I don't know what your father *would do* if he should hear any more such news from you. I have had such a nervous headache I could hardly see out of my eyes, ever since your teacher's letter came. See to it you don't get caught in another such scrape. We should never be able to hold up our heads again, if you should get expelled. Do try to keep the right side of your teachers, every way you can.

" In haste, your anxious, affectionate

" MOTHER."

Not one word about the wrong-doing in itself; the disgrace of being found out was all. No wonder Sue was not a very good girl.

CHAPTER XII.

CONSTANCE.



AFTER Sue Carter had recovered from her pet, on the evening of the ill-starred ride, she had felt the want of Connie Brewster. She longed to talk over her adventure with some confidante, and preferred not to let any one else into her secret. So it happened that Connie heard not only a full description of the ride, the encounter with Miss Hurd, and the interview

with Miss Douglass but the contents of the letter from home.

"What a different letter my mother would have written!" thought Constance, and she trembled to think how near she had come to giving the occasion.

Those were unhappy days for the "Little Beauty." All her pleasure in Sue Carter's companionship was gone. She tried to treat her cordially, feeling that she was really more worthy of friends than she had been before, but she could not overcome an inward shrinking from her as from a serpent she had escaped, which would wind around her again if she went near. Besides, she was weighed down with a sense of meanness that she should be on so much better standing with the teachers than Sue, when, up to the last evening, she had been with her in every thing. Grace Fanshaw urged her to go to Miss Douglass and make a clean breast of it, that she might start afresh, with no falsehood on her record. But Connie was timid; she hungered for the good opinion of those around her. She never felt sure of her teachers' confidence; often she was in a tremor lest they had seen through her; yet they were kind to her, some of them seemed fond of her, and she could not endure the thought of losing what credit she had.

Then she was terrified at the idea of having her mother know how she had been living—that loving, trusting mother! Her conscience called her coward, liar, all sorts of hard names. Every thing Miss Douglass said to the school, every chapter of the Bible read at family worship, every prayer she heard offered, even the talk of the girls around her, seemed to have some reference to her faults and her duty. In vain she tried to quiet herself by the fact that she was trying *now* to do well. She had written the brief note to young Coggin, as her friend had advised, apologizing for having disappointed him and saying, as she had no right to make his acquaintance, he would understand the reason if she dropped it. Grace Fanshaw had carried the note to Miss Douglass, telling her that the object of it was to cut short an acquaintance which should not have been formed, that she knew all about it, and felt certain that if she was at liberty to tell the whole story, Miss Douglass would think best to send it. There were not many girls, probably, whose judgment the Principal would have dared to rely on in such a case, but during the three years Grace had been in the family, she had so well proved, not only her in-

tegrity but her womanliness, that Miss Douglass answered her,

"I think I may trust to your good sense and good taste," and sent a messenger with the note.

So that was ended. Constance began to go back to her old modesty, to her mother's standard of maidenly propriety, and to feel somewhat ashamed of the pains she had taken to exhibit herself in the streets. She tried also to tell the truth, strictly, in the daily reports; still she was constantly harassed by a sense of foes in the rear.

One day, at morning prayer, Miss Douglass had talked to the girls, on the words, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." She had explained how some of our sins are committed against God and our own souls only, and these must be confessed to Him and forsaken; how others have wronged our fellow creatures and must be uncovered and confessed to them, as well. Among other things, she had said this, which Constance could not forget all day, "So far as possible, every lie must be taken back, every wrong must be righted, before our

souls can prosper." It was not pleasant doctrine. She was trying to forsake her sins ; why would n't that do, without confessing them ?

That same day, at evening prayers, she was not listening to the chapter read particularly, she was trying to make out how Dora Jones's hair was put up, when her ear was caught by the words, "God requireth that which is past." During the prayer which followed, Constance was thinking hard and fast ; and the upshot of it was, that just as the "Amen" was spoken, she was saying to herself, "I will go and tell the whole story and have done with it." She went straight to Miss Douglass and asked, "Can I see you alone sometime this evening ?"

An hour was set, and Connie, in the meanwhile, was divided between the dread of going and gladness that now she could not help going. As the time arrived, she went down-stairs, her heart thumping like a little trip-hammer, agitated between the desire to soften down her story and the resolve to make thorough work of it. Miss Douglass was writing at her desk, but she pushed away her work, and drew up an ottoman beside her, for her visitor, with a pleasant welcome.

"Oh, what shall I do! She doesn't know what I've come for. She'll despise me!" thought Connie, as she took the offered seat and gazed into the glowing coals in the grate. For a moment she was possessed by the impulse to run—to get out of it—to make believe she never came. Then quickly came a sense of triumph over her poorer self. She said to it: "Ha! now I have got you here and you are in for it."

Miss Douglass made two or three indifferent remarks, but finding Connie too much pre-occupied to make much reply, she gave it over and waited for her to open her business. She did so, at last, so suddenly that she startled herself, with,

"I have come to tell you what a bad girl I have been, Miss Douglass."

"He that confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy," said the teacher, quoting the words of the morning and taking the young girl's hand in hers, as if to re-assure her.

Even after her preamble, Connie did not know where to begin nor how to go on. Finally, she dashed in and, before she was through, told every thing she could think of which ought to

be told. More than once she hid her face in Miss Douglass's lap for shame, saying,

"Oh dear! you *will* think I am *so* silly!" but a kind hand on her head would encourage her to go on.

It was comparatively easy to confess how she had "broken study-hours" and "communicated" and been "tardy" and all that, but when it came to the "outside rules" that was hard. It would sound so flat—told to a sensible, middle-aged woman, like Miss Douglass, with a dash of satire in her composition; how could she drag to light her little foolish flirtation. She winced at the idea, and was tempted to stop where she was, as if that was all.

Perhaps her teacher saw the danger, for she asked, "How about the street regulations, Connie?"

Then came out by degrees all the tale of acquaintance picked up, of stolen walks, and of the ride so nearly taken. In that matter she was glad to share Sue's blame, as far as she honestly could. When she related how Grace Fanshaw had kept her at home, Miss Douglass exclaimed—

"A friend like that would save many a girl from coming to grief!"

At last it was all out, and the penitent few vastly relieved.

"Now, Connie," asked Miss Douglass, "what harm was it for you to make these acquaintances or to take the walks—what harm would it have been to take the ride?"

"Why, breaking the rules of school and telling wrong stories about it."

"That is bad, and reason enough. But why need there be any such rules? It is hard for a young girl, coming away from home, to have no society but her teachers and school-mates."

"I don't know," said Connie, hesitatingly; "I suppose we should n't study much if we could go anywhere we liked with any one we liked."

"Probably not; but that is not all, Connie. In a home where parents have one daughter or half a dozen to bring up, they can know who their acquaintances are, and whether they are worth having. A good father and mother will try to keep the run of their children's friends, and show hospitality to those who are desirable, and persuade them away from those who are not. Now you can see, Connie, that in a family like this, of fifty daughters, away from their homes, with a large college in the place, made up of young men also

away from their homes, we teachers can't make that discrimination. In that constantly changing crowd of students, we cannot know who would be good friends for you; and if we could, it would not do very well for us to say to one, "You are a fine fellow, you are welcome to call on our young ladies;" and to another, "You are a doubtful character; keep away!" If you were all in one institution, where you would have a chance to know each other more thoroughly, and all be known to the same teachers, it might be safer; but as it is, can't you see for yourself, Connie, that it would n't do?"

"I don't suppose it would," with a sigh, "but it would be kind of nice!"

Miss Douglass smiled and went on—"You young girls have to be guided by us older people about some things which seem no harm in the world to you. Sometimes we can see there is danger of your going astray, where you do not dream of it, and, besides, we want to keep not only your character, but your reputation, spotless. So you have to submit to some of the conventionalities of society—some of its rules of propriety—which seem to you irksome and needless. Of these rules of society, none is more uni-

versally accepted than that a young girl should not keep up a clandestine intercourse with any one of the other sex. To be sure, many young girls are sensible and discriminating, many parents and teachers are exacting and fussy ; still this demand of society is a wise and necessary one, that a young lady should not conceal her friendships from her parents or guardians. If you were at home, it would be your mother's place to know who were your friends, and when and where you met them ; while you are away at school, she commits you to me for the time, and it is my right and duty to take her place in this respect."

"Will my mother need to know anything about it, then?" asked Constance, anxiously.

"What do *you* think?"

"Oh, I could n't bear to have her know it. She thinks *so* much of me!"

Miss Douglass looked at her sadly, thinking of that mother, then said,—

"Would you rather have her know the worst and forgive the wrong you have done her—for you have not honored your mother, Connie—or have always a secret between you, and let her go on thinking you better than you are?"

Constance gazed mournfully into the fire, thinking. At last she said,—

“I would rather have her know the worst, but oh! how can I ever tell her!” and the poor child burst into tears and hid her face in her hands, sobbing out, “She thinks I am so much better than I am!”

Miss Douglass put her arms around her and said, in comforting tones,—

“By God’s help, dear child, you can become all she thinks you. You need Christ in your heart. You have been finding out how weak you are; now find out how strong He is.”

Callers were announced, and, hastily drying her tears and swallowing her sobs, Constance rose to go.

“You will write your mother to-morrow all about it?” asked Miss Douglass. “Perhaps it is not necessary to go into all the particulars, as you have with me, but give her a definite idea how you have been doing.”

“Yes, Miss Douglass, I will do it,” said Constance.

“And you understand, my child, that it would not do for you to stay with us if you were going on as you have done. If you find the strain

upon your truth too great, it will be better for you to be at some other school, where so much will not be asked of it. But I hope better things of you, Constance."

" You shall not be disappointed if I can help it," said the young girl warmly, and, with a cordial good-night kiss, the much dreaded conference was ended.

Long after the house was still, and the buoyant young life that filled it had subsided into sleep, the Principal sat before her grate, her eyes fixed on the changing coals, thinking anxiously. She was troubled about these two girls—Sue Carter, with her wretched home-training and her flimsy material of character—Constance, with so many pleasant traits, yet so easily influenced, with the deadly habit of deception formed. How many more might still be living the same sort of double life that she had been? Then there was Maud Heath, whom she had tried long and hard to win to a better mind, obstinate and sullen as ever; Florence Hare, who professed to be one of her own warmest friends and admirers, but had come just as near being impudent that day as any one ever dared with her, because she was refused a permission she wanted very much.

What could be done to make Hortense Harvey and certain other girls think more of what they put into their heads than what they put on them? Then that irrepressible Holly Tucker! That very morning she had distracted the attention of the whole school by giggling out in the midst of the service. Was it best to keep her among so many girls, where her uncontrollable nerves were always upsetting somebody or something? Was there any way to electrify Miss Black's torpid mind to action, or to interest Nannie White in reading anything stronger than third-rate stories?

One and another came before her, each bringing with her faults which were a peculiar ground of solicitude. Then there was herself—it was so hard always to "warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient towards all!"

Her heart sank within her, sighing,—“Who is sufficient for these things?” She turned to Him whose strength is equal to all human need, and tried to cast her care on Him. One after another of her charge she committed to Him, going over their individual wants and dangers, seeking, with all her heart, wisdom, patience and love to deal with them as He would have her.

Then she thought of the many true, noble girls whom she saw growing in strength and loveliness of character from month to month—of the “old scholars” whose girl-life had already ripened into beautiful, beneficent womanhood—of the love and gratitude they gave her, beyond her best deserving, and she thanked God fervently, asking for herself, only to be worthy of her work.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHICH WAY?



CONNSTANCE BREWSTER waited anxiously till "day after to-morrow," for a reply to her home-letter. Meanwhile, she was glad to be able to tell Sue Carter that she had confessed, and taken the blame which belonged to her. Sue inquired strictly about the conversation, and felt deeply wronged that Connie should have been treated more gently than she had been.

"Just what I might have expected! She is a partial, hateful old thing! Some girls always can get around the teachers. I thank my stars, I

never soft-soaped them. You did just exactly the same as I, except the ride, and that you would have done if you had dared ; and here I am, put on probation, to have my head snapped off if I don't toe the mark to a T, while *you* can do what you please, and she just pats you on the head, and says, 'Oh, well, dear, never mind, don't do so again !' She is just as mean as dirt !"

" You have no business to talk so," said Connie, trembling with wrath.

" I believe it is a free country," returned Sue, haughtily. " I shall say what I please. If I only had a pretty face and soft ways and a rich mother, perhaps I could get along too," she concluded, with an insinuating manner.

Constance was too angry to trust herself to speak. She went out, resisting the inclination to slam the door, and shut herself into her own room to cool off. Had she "soft-soaped" the teachers? No ; she was sure she had only acted as she felt. Had Miss Douglass been partial to her? It was true she had done nearly the same as Sue, and that she had been less severely treated. What made the difference? Her vanity furtively caught at the idea that her pretty face and winning ways—not "soft!"—made her a favorite,

and that was it. She reflected, however, that she, of her own accord, went and confessed, as Sue did not; and also that she had been distinctly told, as well as the other, that she could not stay unless she carried herself differently. As to the "rich mother," that was all nonsense ; the Carters were just as well off as *they* were, and if they were not it would be nothing to the purpose.

Still, she inclined to the opinion that Sue was half right, and that the Principal was a little partial, but, since the leaning was towards her side, she did not lay it up against her.

Meanwhile, that lady was feeling quite innocent of any such injustice. Sue's confession had been laboriously pumped out of her by a chain of facts already known. Her only real regret was at being found out. Trickery was clearly ingrain with her, and could be got out only by severe measures, if at all.

Constance, on the other hand, was a novice in deception ; declined the ride, partly, to be sure, under Grace Fanshaw's compulsion, but partly of her own accord ; had dismissed her unlawful acquaintance ; had begun a reform ; had come, and of her own free-will told facts, to her own

discredit, which might never have been known otherwise. So it was plain enough, to the Principal, that the second did not require as heavy bonds to keep the peace as the first. She was open to other considerations.

Connie's letter came at last, full of tender sorrow. It ran :

MY PRECIOUS CHILD,—I thank God for giving you courage to tell me the truth! You know how your mother's heart is bound up in you, darling ; and it must have cost you a bitter struggle to write what you knew would cost her bitter pain. But it was the only right way, and, that you brought yourself to do it, is a token to me that you are beginning a better life. My own, my only child, let there be no concealments between us !

You have not been out of my thoughts since your letter came last evening, except as I fell asleep for an hour or two, towards morning, and then I dreamed of you. Sometimes, I feel that I must fly to you and bring you home, and keep you safe under my own wing. It is so terrible to think of my own dear little Connie, who always told me everything, learning to act a deceitful

part ! Then I think I cannot always shelter my darling. I hope she will live many years after I have gone to my rest. ("No ! no !" whispered Connie, dashing the tears from her eyes.) She must learn to go alone, yet not alone, for the Father is with her. Oh, my darling, I can never feel at rest about you, till I know you have given yourself into His keeping ! I know you are truly sorry for your wrong-doing ; I believe every word you say about your resolve to do well, but I dare not trust your best strength, dear child, any more than I do my own. Our dear Saviour knew us, better than we know ourselves, when He said, "Without me, ye can do nothing." Give your heart to Him, my dear one ; cling fast to Him, and He will "keep your feet from falling, your eyes from tears and your soul from death."

I am mortified that my daughter should have allowed attentions from a stranger which she ought to receive only from friends. Perhaps I am partly to blame, because I never put you on your guard about such things, but I never dreamed of my little Connie being bewitched with the idea of beaux, at least for years yet. And if I had, I should have taken it for granted, I suppose, that she would know the part of a lady.

If any one else had told me she had overstepped the bounds of womanly modesty and propriety, I should have found it hard to believe it.

Be my own merry, light-hearted darling; enjoy all the innocent pleasure you can, but beware of everything that fears the light. Now that you are away from me, remember that I have entrusted you to your teachers' care, and be dutiful and true towards them, as you would towards me. I shall write to Miss Douglass by this mail, if I have time. Give my love to Miss Fanshaw, and tell her I thank her, from my heart, for being so true a friend to my dear child. May God bless her!

I had a letter from your Aunt Sophie yesterday. They expect Henry and Dora by the next steamer. Your uncle and Fred go to New York to meet them.

The English ivy has got clear around to your father's portrait, and the Lady Washington geranium is full of blossoms. Your kitty had a fresh blue ribbon on her neck yesterday, and I let her sit in the low rocking-chair a good deal now-a-days, for your sake.

You don't write me whether you are wearing your flannels, dear. I know you don't like them,

but it is not safe to go without them, and you will wear them for mother's sake. Would you like one of those scarlet flannel jackets when I send your box? If so, tell me, when you write, whether you would like it trimmed with black or white. I *must* stop, for the sewing society is to meet here this afternoon, and I have done nothing yet towards getting ready.

Write me, my darling, very frankly and very often. To the Father of the fatherless, I commit you. Remember you are everything to

YOUR MOTHER.

Connie cried over this letter a good while. Then she went and read it to Grace Fanshaw, for she was too young to keep either joy or sorrow to herself. Grace heard it through, and sat without speaking a few minutes; then she said,—

“I don't see how a girl with a mother like that can ever do anything wrong.”

“Bless your heart, I can just as easy!” and Connie slipped the last word off her tongue with a lazy circumflex that illustrated the ease.

“She is an angel, and you are not half good enough to belong to her.”

“I know it,” said Connie, meekly. She sat,

looking very sober, absently playing with the tassels of Grace's morning dress. Suddenly throwing them down, she clasped her hands hard together and exclaimed,—

"I would give anything if I was a Christian. Nothing in this world would make my mother so happy. What shall I do?" She lifted her violet eyes, dewy with tears, to her friend's face.

"I cannot tell you, Connie," said Grace, very seriously. "I wish I could."

The wistful eyes changed in expression; they asked a question.

"No, Connie," said Grace, answering it, "I am not a Christian. I wish I were."

Constance looked half relieved, half disappointed. She said,—

"I am sure I don't care to be any better than you are."

"Don't you go by me, Constance," said Grace, emphatically. "I ought to be a Christian, and so ought you. With such a mother as yours, I don't see how you can help it. Ask her what to do."

At this point the conversation was broken off by the irruption of a skating party just back from the pond and eager to tell their adventures.

Florence Hare never had such an excruciatingly good time in all her born days. The ice was so smooth a fly would have slipped up on it. Every man, woman and child in town was on skates. She slipped down once and hit the back of her head—thought, for full five minutes, she was dead; but the girls pulled her up after a while. “Never had such an elegant time in all my life,” she concluded. “I verily believe my ears are frozen. See my skates! They are full forty years old, but I sha’n’t get any more this winter—nor till after Christmas next. It is always prudent to wait till after Christmas,” and so they rattled on, till Florence declared she was completely melted and must go and get off her things.

After they were gone, Grace sat silently thinking, pale, serious, absorbed. As she had told Constance, she believed she was not a Christian. For months past she had thought of her religious duty, and now she saw—what she shrunk from seeing—that the interests of another soul had become entangled with hers so that, in effect, she was likely to act for two.

Grace’s character came largely from her father, who died when she was twelve years old.

Young as she was, an intense love and admiration of him had been the ruling passion of her life. Though caresses and endearments were rare between them, there was a quick comprehension, a deep and delicate sympathy, a oneness of nature that made the man and the little girl unutterably dear to each other. When he was snatched from her by sudden death, she did not strive nor cry, but, 'in close heart shutting up her pain,' the bereaved child went silently about pining with such wearing grief that her friends feared for her life. Years had taught her to bear the sorrow, but they had not taken it away. Her father, with his strict truth and honor and justice, his intellectual taste and culture, was still the ruling power in her life. A wealthy bachelor uncle had invited her mother and her to come and make his house into a home; and took great pride in them both. Her mother was a showy, fashionable woman, rather affectionate, but mainly engrossed in the great question—"Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" The home atmosphere was entirely worldly. If religion was referred to at all, it was in a light, mocking way, or, at best, only to point a moral or adorn a tale.

During the three years Grace had spent at Thornton Hall, she had seen the Bible deferred to as an inspired guide—heard earnest views of duty and destiny constantly inculcated. Not only in the public teaching of the school, but in many a quiet conversation, she had been urged to receive Jesus Christ as her Redeemer and King. Meanwhile, she had been a keen observer, Without being censorious, perhaps, she was at least a strict judge of character. She saw plenty of discrepancies between the lives around her and that of the Master they professed to follow, but, after all, she was well convinced there was something in the religion of Jesus that was not in her—something which she needed. Yet she had not yielded herself to God. Foresight and uncompromising wholeness of action were natural to her, and she comprehended, better than most young girls do, how much is implied in “coming to Christ.” For weeks she had seen clearly what she ought to do, but had not been willing to do it. Here was a new motive, and to one of her honor-loving spirit, a strong one. She had acquired a powerful influence over this young girl; should she fail to lead her aright in what might be the great crisis of her life? All

that day she thought of little else. It was recreation day, so that school duties did not claim her ; she avoided the society of the girls. Her hands were busy much of the time, but her thoughts were far within, "accusing or else excusing one another."

She felt no horror of great darkness, no crushing sense of sin such as she had read about, no tempest of emotion, saw no vision of heavenly love ; she only felt that her life, especially her inner life, had been far below the Bible standard ; that she needed forgiveness, and, more than that, she needed a renewing power within her soul to make it pure and loving. At last she said to herself, "It is mean and wicked to hesitate ; if I wait for more feeling, I shall wait forever." Her room-mate was sitting with her reading aloud a newspaper ; she could not kneel, she could not even whisper a prayer ; but her spirit looked up to the Father of spirits, saying, "I am thine ; take me for my Saviour's sake." For the first time in her life it was clear to her as any fact of consciousness, that she wished the Saviour to rule in and reign over her. At the moment that was the one idea that filled her mind. It was believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, so

believing that she was no longer unwilling nor afraid to give herself wholly over to His control and care.

There came no "great awakening light;" she did not feel in all her members that she had passed from death unto life; yet she did feel a sweet peace of conscience, and that sense of rest and relief we always have when a great and long-vexed question is not only settled, but settled right. Could this quiet change be the new birth? She had not been through the slough of despond, neither had she caught any glimpse of the delectable mountains—they were farther on—but she reasoned within herself,—“He says, ‘Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out;’ I come as well as I can with this hard heart. If I come, it must be He takes me. If He takes me, He will give me the penitence and faith and love.”

She longed to have Laura get through her paper and go away, that she might be quite alone with her new Master, and ratify the covenant between them. Still she read on—news, births, marriages, deaths, witticisms; but at last she started up and declared she must go down street. As soon as she was out of the room, Grace knelt

by her bed-side, and in whispered words confessed her sins, asked pardon, and consecrated her whole self with all her future life to God, imploring that He who "came to save His people from their sins" might be her Saviour. It was serious, thoughtful, sincere, but there was no groan nor tear nor smile. She was troubled to find herself so calm. She remembered how pale and despairing Kate Campbell had looked for days, and then how radiant with love and joy she had seemed when she was converted. Then she comforted herself with the thought, "I should n't be I if I was like that."

She opened her writing-desk and wrote out a sort of oath of allegiance to the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, weighing every word before she put it down. Then she read it over, and the sense of her own weakness and sin grew oppressively strong. It seemed presumption for her to make any such vow, but she ended it with the petition, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God,"—read it over to Him, prayed over it, and then ventured to sign it. She wrote her name in full, and the date, folded it and laid it away, in the inmost recess of her desk, saying to herself, "It will help to hold me."

Two or three hours later, Grace called Connie Brewster into her room and said,

"Connie, I want to take back what I told you this morning ; I hope I *am* a Christian."

Constance looked up in surprise ; though her conscience was ill at ease, it had been more quiet since she knew that her paragon, who did so many things like a Christian, was not one.

It was never easy for Grace Fanshaw to speak of her inner experience, but she told Constance, as she thought she ought, something of it ; then she said,

"But I am not fit to be a guide for you. Go to one of the teachers for advice, if you think you need any ; only don't rest, Connie, till you have done as your mother says, given your soul into Christ's keeping."

For many days, Constance was in trouble ; she "wanted to be a Christian"—she read her Bible and prayed—she often talked about it, either with Grace or with Miss Atherton, not without tears ; still she did not find rest.

The fact was, her taste for pleasure was exceedingly keen—the world looked so large and so bright and she had tried so little of it ! She would not have admitted, even to herself, that

she wished to do anything wicked, only she wanted to be free to do anything that might seem attractive. Christ was saying, "Take my yoke upon you," and she did not want any yoke upon her ; she wanted to run wild and "have a good time." She could not see that whatever "good times" her Saviour would not let her have, would end in bitterness. She did not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ; she believed that He was the Son of God, who died to redeem the world, and all that, but she did not at the bottom of her heart believe that he would lead her own little self in the happiest way ; so she shrank away from Him ; she dreaded to put her hand in His; He looked to her like a hard Master. She was a "lover of pleasure more than a lover of God."

Sometimes she tried to forget, but she could not, and, if she could, she dared not. If she laughed off her anxiety among the girls, hardly an hour would pass before a few moments of solitude, or family worship, or a wistful look from Miss Atherton, or a strong word from Grace, would bring it all back again with more self-reproach than ever.

So she lingered between God and Mammon,

not taking the comfort of either. Nearly two weeks had worn away in this state of things when she delayed after school, one day, in the Algebra recitation room, to get some extra explanation from Miss Atherton.

Connie suffered many things of Algebra, as she had of Arithmetic before it. Miss Atherton had expounded the whys and wherefores till she got as clear a glimmer of them as her mental vision was able to discern, and she had closed the book to go. As she looked up to thank her teacher for taking so much pains, she found her soft hazel eyes fixed upon her so sorrowfully that the words died away on her lips and her eyelids drooped. Miss Atherton put her arms around her and said, in a low voice full of tears,

“My poor Connie, I am afraid you will lose your soul!”

Constance started ; she did not think any girl with such a mother as hers could really be in danger of losing her soul ! She said in a complaining tone,

“I don’t see what more I can do, Miss Atherton ; I have been trying for two weeks now, and I don’t see as I am any better.”

“I am afraid you are worse, Connie. For two

weeks, you have heard the Saviour saying, ‘Give me thy heart,’ and you have not obeyed.”

“I don’t know how,” said Constance, looking distressed.

“I do not know as there is much ‘how’ about it,” replied Miss Atherton. “Do it; that is all. You know a good deal about Jesus; you know He is altogether lovely, God manifest in the flesh; you know He has lived and died on earth to save you; you know He deserves your heart’s best love, and you will not give it, because you want to please yourself rather than Him. Oh, Connie, you have no idea how much there is in life beside pleasure! You cannot know how much you will need the love of Jesus.” The pleading eyes were full of tears, the pleading voice, of meaning.

Connie’s quick embrace and kiss of sympathy were tender and sincere. She felt, instinctively, that her friend was speaking out of the depths of her own experience. The girls all knew Miss Atherton was an orphan, and she was so gentle and shrinking they often felt like taking her under their protection, rather than expecting her to take care of them.

She brushed away the tears and went on,
“ You know He will ask nothing of you that
is not kind ; if He asks, you may be sure it is
kind, whatever it is. He loves to have us happy.
Connie. He gave us our very power of being
happy ; but He wants most to have us good ;
don’t you want to be good, dear—whatever it
costs ?”

Constance felt shamed, to the bottom of her
heart. She had stood wrangling with Jesus
about pleasure, wanting that—whatever it cost.
Looking through the longing eyes of this friend,
she began to see the beauty of holiness.

“ Remember, Connie, ‘ Every good and perfect
gift comes from God.’ He is ‘ the Father of
Lights.’ Can’t you trust Him to give you all
the pleasure that is good for you ? And do you
want any more ?”

“ I have wanted it, whether it was good for me
or not,” answered Connie, soberly.

“ Don’t you really think a Christian life is the
happiest ?”

“ Yes ; I know it is, but it wasn’t happiness
exactly, I wanted. I wanted pleasure—excite-
ment—gayety.”

“ But to have it, you would not grieve the

dear Saviour, and put from you everlasting life?" said the other, looking into her face anxiously, almost wonderingly. "If He said, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me,' how much more would He say, 'He that loveth gayety more than me, is not worthy of me.' Dear Connie! think what a choice you are making! If He denies you any pleasure, it will be because it is stained with sin, or because He has something better for you than just to enjoy yourself." She paused a moment, pale and earnest, then she said in a low voice, as if she were treading on holy ground,

"Sometimes, when I do not know what to do, I try to think what my father and mother would say if they could speak to me."

Constance dropped her head on her friend's shoulder, and burst out crying, like a child. There came back to her that solemn midnight, five years gone, when her dear, dying father, had laid his hand upon her head, breathing out his life in prayer for her.

"Oh, I am so weak and wicked!" she said at last. "I promised my father"—sobbing bitterly—"I promised I wòuld try to meet him in heaven. What must he think of me! Oh! do you think

God can forgive me? I have been so selfish and foolish!"

"Do you *want* to be forgiven, dear? You know repentance is the condition of forgiveness, and repentance implies turning away from sin."

"Oh, I do, I do! I despise myself for being so foolish. If He only will save me from it, I do want to have Him."

Miss Atherton quietly turned the key in the door to prevent intrusion, then she said,

"Come, Connie, let us kneel down together and ask Him to do it."

In a short, fervent prayer, she implored God to give the child both repentance and remission of sins—to deepen this longing after Him and after goodness, into the ruling passion of her life—to enable her then and there to choose Christ for her Master and Lord.

The heart of Constance went into the prayer. Perhaps it was answered even while it was offered, for it did seem as if, from that time, the hunger and thirst after righteousness took the place of the craving for pleasure, as the strongest desire of her heart. The choice was not half deep enough, half constant enough. Often yet was the beauty of holiness to be dimmed, for her

eyes, by the dazzle of forbidden joys; but the time had gone by forever when she could be satisfied, or thought she could be satisfied, with "pleasure — excitement — gayety." God had shown her better things.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOTHING BUT A MARCH STORM.



OME, Hazie, you'll be late!" from Maggie McBride, brushing out her golden hair at the glass.

"Yes," very drowsily, from Alice Hazeltine, in bed.

"It is only twenty minutes to breakfast-time," from Maggie, putting in her collar-pin.

"I — can — do it in fifteen," from Alice, burying her face in the pillow.

"Why!" exclaimed Maggie, rolling up the curtain, "it is snowing!"

"It is! I thought we had seen the last of it,"

cried Alice, starting up with her eyes wide open.

“Up with you, now! You will have to scramble with might and main. Want your gymnasium dress?”

“Yes, thank you.” Alice scrambled. Everything was contrary. “Mercy! how my hair acts! Where is my button-hook? There’s the breakfast bell! What *shall* I do!

“‘If you get there before I do,
Look out for me, I’m coming too!’”

As Alice, arriving outside the dining-room door just in time to hear those fifty chairs pulled out and pulled back, stood waiting while the blessing was asked, she concluded those last five minutes of sleep didn’t pay. That impression was deepened as she walked in under a battery of eyes, and felt Miss Douglass looking at her hastily dressed hair, Miss Lincoln at her half-buttoned boots.

The Seminary proper, where all school exercises were held, was a separate building from Thornton Hall, where the girls lived; so there was running to and fro at every bell. The air was full of fine snow, all the morning, which

made all the world light grey ; there were little drifts on the window-panes, great drifts on the door steps ; there was slipping, screaming, in the path, stamping in the entries ; there were water-proofs upstairs, down stairs, in the lady's chamber. By noon, the fine, fast, steady fall had laid so deep a bed of snow on the ground that the day-scholars from a distance were advised to go home. By the time school was done in the afternoon, the janitor came, wading through the drifts, from the Post-Office, saying no trains were in since morning, and that it was useless for any woman to think of walking. The snow whirls and drives and thickens, as if Winter had left over heaps upon heaps of it, which Spring was determined to sweep down all at once, and have them out of the way.

Miss Douglass comes to the three or four day-scholars, discussing their prospects at a window, saying,

“ You must n’t think of going home, girls ; the drifts are too deep, and the storm is blinding. Unless your fathers send for you, you must let us make you as comfortable as you can be with us. We will see that you have everything you need, and if you have to get along

with rather close quarters, perhaps you will not mind it."

Delia Harper thanks her and accepts the invitation; Christabel Croly wants to know if she may not try to get home, provided she is willing to risk it; Jane Morgan weeps, and declares she *can't* stay.

More watching at the windows;—a man des-cried, battling the storm—floundering in the drifts—ploughing through the snow.

"My father!" shouts Jenny Morgan, and flies to the front door to meet him. Storm howls after him, flinging handfuls of snow at him through the crack of the door, before he can push it together after him. Mr. Morgan sinks down on a seat, panting, red as a flame.

"Oh, papa, you have come for me! Good! good! good! Miss Douglass wanted me to stay all night, but I would n't have been hired to."

"Hired to!" gasped Mr. Morgan. "You ought to be thankful for a shelter. Fearful storm!"

Jenny's face fell, tears rose.

"I have my rubber boots and water-proof; I can go as well as not."

"Nonsense, child! You don't know what you

are talking about. It is terrible. You can't see a yard before your face."

"I don't care if I can't see; I know the way," teased Jenny, sullenly.

"You could n't get home. The drifts are too deep. It was all I could do to get through. If Miss Douglass can keep you, I shall be much obliged to her; I was only afraid you would start before I could get here."

"Only wish I had," muttered Jane.

Mr. Morgan looked at his daughter with displeasure as she stood at the side light of the door looking disconsolately out at a loop-hole the snow had left. Why need she always take things "by the blade instead of the haft." Poor man! She got it from her mother, more's the pity.

"Mr. Morgan," said Delia Harper's pleasant voice, "would it be too much trouble for you to call at our house, as you go by, and tell them I am all right? Miss Douglass says she can provide for us as well as not, and I think they had better not try to send."

"Certainly, I'll do it with pleasure. Do you hear that, Jennie? Miss Delia seems to think there's no trouble about staying."

Jenny gave a dissenting grunt without turning her head. Out of a recitation room came Chris Croley.

"Do you know anything about how it is down our way, Mr. Morgan. Don't you suppose a good stout girl like me could get through?"

"Bless your heart, Miss Croly, it would be all a good stout Irishman could do to get down to your house. The snow drives so, right in your face and eyes, you see; then there is always the worst drift in town along there by Dave Martin's."

"I wish you could send to them," said Delia. "Your mother will worry about you, won't she?"

"She is n't one of the worrying kind," answered Chris, smiling, "and she has great faith in Miss Douglass if she has n't in me. I guess they will take it for granted I am safe."

"Well, good-by, Jenny," said Mr. Morgan, girding up his loins, that is, buttoning up his great coat, for a start. "You must make the best of it."

"I don't see why I can't go, just as well as you," said Jenny sulkily, still peering out at the narrow strip of window pane.

"Tut! Tut!" exclaimed her father, mortified by her ill-temper; "I suppose you want to see your mother, but you must be reasonable. Good-by."

Jenny did not answer. A great gust with its arms full of snow seized the opportunity to rush in as Mr. Morgan forced his way out. The other girls ran into one of the recitation rooms to watch him through the eddying whiteness as he made his way slowly up the street.

"What a shame for a girl to treat her father so!" said Delia to Chris, indignantly, as they lost him in a cloud of snow and turned away.

"I should like to give her a good shaking," responded Chris. "Poor man! To fight his way through this awful storm only to get sulked at like that!"

"But I ache to try the weather, I feel just like braving it."

She looked it—bright eyes—white teeth—red cheeks—broad, full chest—shapely, strong hands—she was the picture of a healthy, happy, fearless girl.

"Well, you can get a little taste of it, going over to Thornton Hall," Delia answered. "Come, Jenny, let's go over now and see 'our friends.'"

As the family came from the supper-room, Miss Douglass said to Miss Lincoln,

"I wish we could do something to make it pleasant for the girls this evening. It is such a howling night."

"So do I; why can't we get up some tabl-
eaux?"

"Or charades; they require more wit and less work. Will you undertake it?"

"Yes, indeed, I should like it," replied Miss Lincoln, who relished a little fun as keenly as any of the girls.

"Engage the young ladies you think will be the best help, and plan every thing beforehand in a quiet way; then I will send around to them all to come down to the parlor."

"Poor little Lou Holinshed; I wish she could enjoy it too. She isn't able to come down stairs, is she?"

"No, and yet she is able to enjoy it, and it would do her good. Could we get into her room? It is larger than any other, you know."

"Why, yes; girls are compressible; they wouldn't mind being packed rather closely for Lou's sake."

It takes but a small variation from routine to

give a wonderful amount of pleasure to a house full of school-girls. Spirits, which were getting homesick under the wild shrieking of the wind, came up with a bound as the summons was given at each door, "Come to Lou Holinshed's room for a frolic."

Miss Lincoln was happy in thinking up charades which would bring into play the girls' peculiar gifts.

Virginia Raleigh, with her tropical eyes, and a Spanish veil she had worn in Cuba and her guitar for accompaniments, sang a bewitching Andalusian song. Smoked cork and a bandanna turban made Holly Tucker, a capital negress, loose joints, laughter and all. Connie Brewster, in a very short dress and high necked apron, was a charming little spoilt pet, and Florence Hare, with a dressy cap made out of two lace collars and plenty of artificial flowers, did finely as a lazy, good-natured mother for her to tease. Kate Campbell was invaluable; there seemed to be no character she was not equal to. Grace Fanshaw willingly put on the fine array she had refused to wear to the party, and played the fine lady. Belle Stanton, as an Italian improvisatrice, was pronounced "too splendid for anything," but

proved not too splendid for a gypsy fortuneteller in the next scene. Helen Campbell delivered a lecture on "The Elegance of the Wigglety-Wag Manners, Combined with the Rufflety-Pufflety-Tag Style of Dress," which brought down the house. Chris Croly talked Irish like a veritable daughter of Erin and finished the performance with an irresistible recitation of the *Lost Heir*.

Then the girls counted it all fun to devise sleeping accommodations in the crowded house for their unexpected guests. A bed on the floor or a night on a lounge is such an unusual luxury, Chris Croly and "Daffa-down-dilly," were in great request as guests, but the company of the lachrymose Miss Morgan did not seem to be coveted. She was put into the vacant place with Almira Dole.

The next morning, many eyes opened with a curiosity to see what sort of a day it was; but no day was to be seen—nothing but snow—in the sky—in the air—all over the world. But the odd sense of isolation only brought a new glow of inside comfort to the household of merry young creatures shut up in Thornton Hall. The announcement at breakfast that there would be no

school, as it was impossible for the day scholars to reach them, and that they might all do as they pleased, that day, so long as they pleased to do well, was received with applause. The sound of the door bell made a general sensation. The front door, frozen together, is forced open with much pulling and pushing, and there stands Chris Croly's brother, a sight to behold. The young ladies flock about him as a messenger from the outer world. The stalwart young fellow, his face all aglow, his curling black hair and beard half whitened, his fur cap decked with stars, a snow drift on each broad shoulder, snow clinging above his seven-league boots, is greeted like a hero, quite to his own amazement and amusement. To tell the truth, nothing would please him better than to be a hero in one pair of eyes in that crowd. Hortense Harvey was nearer the truth than she knew, when she whispered Kate Campbell so archly that she guessed brotherly anxiety was n't the only thing that brought him through the drifts. Kate snubbed her, to be sure, but she could n't deny that it was rather pleasant to see him. Chris' flew at him, showering down questions about them all at home, as if she had been gone a week. Jennie

Morgan slunk into a corner, muttering that she should think somebody might come to see her.

When young Croly had assured himself of his sister's welfare, warmed his heart by a little banter with Kate, and departed, the girls gather in knots all over the house, to talk, work, read, sing and play together. Here and there a solitary maiden seized the extra time to write letters or make up a lost lesson.

"Alas, my friends!" sighed Florence Hare; "would I had been warned, that I might have laid in provisions against this siege. My soul yearns for some molasses candy."

"Why can't we have a candy pull?" cried Belle Stanton.

"Audacious mortal!" returned Florence. "They would n't let us."

"See if they won't. I believe it can be done."

"Oh, would n't it be jolly," exclaimed Holly Tucker, her large, round eyes standing out with eagerness.

"We will appoint you a committee of one, Belle, to wait on the powers that be. You can get leave if any one can," said Florence.

"That's it!" "Go ahead, Belle, and good luck

to you!" "Make yourself irresistible." "Don't dare to come back with No for an answer," were flung at her as she sprang up, shook herself out, knocked up her hair a little here and there and started.

Holly began to relieve her excited hopes by a clog dance, but Virginia Raleigh pulled her down, saying,—

"Come, come, Holly, you must be tolerably quiet if you want any more liberties."

After a season of anxious speculation on their part, their messenger appeared.

"What did she say?"

Miss Douglass did n't care if Mrs. Clark did n't. Mrs. Clark did n't care for this once, as this was a very uncommon occasion, if they would come after dinner was all cleared away and be through before it was time to commence getting supper. "Only you must not expect ever to do it again," concluded Belle. "It is too much bother. This is an exceptional case."

"All right! I am up to exceptions of every description," shouted Hollyhock.

"Good for Mrs. Clark!"

"We will hold her in sweet remembrance."

"I appoint Miss Campbell and Miss Hazeltine,

Committee on Molasses," announced Florence Hare.

"See here, Old Lady," remarked Kate Campbell, "you have something to do besides sitting there appointing committees. I appoint you a Committee on Kettle, Butter and Saleratus."

"We can't begin much before three o'clock, can we?"

"Think not."

"What do you say to reading 'Snow Bound' in the meanwhile? Here, Virgie Raleigh, you read."

"Yes, do. I always love to hear you."

The girls were really getting fond of Virginia; she seemed "different somehow;" then she did read delightfully, with a rich, musical voice and great fervor.

"I?" said Virginia. "What do I know about it? I never spent a winter in the North in my life before. Let Helen Campbell read it. She knows all about it, and reads better than I do - any way."

"Deed, she does know all about it!" exclaimed Kate. "I tell you, it used to be fun to have such a storm as this, when we were all at home!"

"Did n't you tell me you lived on a farm?"

said Florence. "I should think it would be awfully lonesome."

"Lonesome? Not a bit of it," replied Kate.

"We always stay in the country from June to September, but I should think it would be dismal to live there all the year round."

"Oh, you don't know half the beauty of it," exclaimed Helen. "City people come up our valley"—the Campbells' home was one of those beautiful Connecticut-river farms—"and think they have *seen* our mountains and our meadows. What do they know about them?"

"I imagined," said Grace Fanshaw, "that we, who saw them as a rarity, enjoyed them more than you who are used to them!"

"No, *indeed!*!" answered Helen, shaking her head—Kate shaking hers still more positively. "You admire them, we love them. You don't know how the brooks dash down in the spring-time, nor how the rivers overflow; you never scratched away the pine-needles to find May-flowers, nor brought home your apron full of the first bright mosses. You have no idea of the thousand fancies the fog takes into its head, nor how the first autumn snow on the mountains flushes rosy at sunset and shades down into the

purple forest. You never saw the maples flaming over all the hills, nor the glistening snow-days, nor the glittering ice days—”

“ Well done, Nell,” said Belle Stanton, patting her shoulder as she stopped suddenly, blushing at her own vehemence.

“ I feel that I am a benighted heathen,” meekly remarked Grace Fanshaw.

“ It is all very fine about your brooks and your Mayflowers,” said Florence, “ but, after all, I can’t get on without *people*.”

“ You would n’t suffer for lack of people, if you were one of eight brothers and sisters,” suggested Kate.

“ Are there *eight* of you? My stars! I don’t get any more attention than I want, and there is only one of me,” said Florence.

“ Poor creature! How lonesome you must be!” exclaimed Kate, returning her sympathy.

“ Do you suppose they miss you any, with six left?” asked Virginia.

“ Miss us! No trouble about that, I assure you. Besides, we are getting scattered the world over. George is a missionary in India. My eyes! how I cried when he went away! Mary is married in Chicago; she is lovely, a great deal

nicer than Nell or I. Sam is mining engineer in South America. Dear old fellow! what would n't I give to see him? Will is in Yale—sha'n't ever let him come here. He would turn all your heads. Nell and I are in Grattan Seminary, you may have noticed. Frank is just through Scientific school, and helping father on the farm; he's a splendid boy, just right for his name, generous and open-hearted as he can be. So he and little Bess are all there are left at home. Oh, you should see Bess! She is the grand finale, smart as a trap and bright as a dollar."

"Kate, *do* stop bragging of the family," said Helen.

"No need of anything farther, so long as I have you to show. Father and mother are above all praise," retorted Kate.

"You are silenced, Nell," said Grace, laughing.

"Not quite," said Helen, opening her book and beginning,—

"The sun that brief December day
Rose cheerless over hills of gray."

Helen read, if with less fire than Virginia, with exquisite utterance and appreciation, so that the ideas of the author seemed to steal into the mind

of the hearer clear and perfect, as if they had passed through no medium at all. The girls listened with delighted attention till the beautiful "Winter Idyl" was finished, then talked over it and its poet, mingling their fresh blessings with the

"Thanks untraced to lips unknown,
That greet 'him' like the odors blown
From unseen meadows newly mown."

The third morning, as Thornton Hall woke from its slumbers, it rung with the exclamations, "Splendid!" "Glorious!" "Beautiful!"

The girls hurried through dressing to look out of the windows.

"Oh, Grace Fanshaw, *will* you come look at this grove?" called Belle. Grace came and found her in a glow of admiration.

"Do you see how every branch and twig is piled with snow. How still they stand so as not to shake it off. The very wind is holding his breath for fear of disturbing it."

"See the shadows of those elms," said Grace, her face not radiant like Belle's, but thoroughly happy. "How blue and delicate they are!"

"Girls, did you ever see anything like this before?" asked Virginia, stopping at the door.

"Yes, indeed, a thousand times," Belle answered; "but it is just as beautiful to me every time."

"Why? Didn't you, ever?" asked Nannie White, Belle's room-mate, looking up at Virginia, who was gazing out with eyes full of wonder and delight.

"Never. I supposed I had seen snow, but I never before saw it that deep that the stubble couldn't somewhere stick its fingers through it. Talk about the tropics! There is nothing lovelier than this. Every outline is perfect grace!"

"Just look at Mr. Brown's hen house, will you!" said Grace. "Wonder if the biddies dreamt they dwelt in marble halls?"

"Oh, see! There's a bluebird! You poor, dear little creature, how did you ever live through this storm!" exclaimed Belle.

"Where?" "I don't see him!" "There he is!"

"Oh, how pretty his blue is on the snow! There he goes! See! oh, see! he has lighted on the corner of the balustrade; he knows how to show himself to advantage."

"He must be hungry; I wonder he isn't dead."

At that moment a window was softly raised, and Mrs. Clark's hand and arm appeared, scattering crumbs on the balcony.

"Oh, you poor, dear little fool!" cried Belle, as Bluebird took fright and fluttered away.

"That is always the way," said Grace." I tried to feed the birds when I first came here—flattered myself I should be another Hilda, but it seemed to be currently reported and commonly believed among the ungrateful little scamps, that I was throwing stones at them. They invariably took to their wings as soon as my bounty appeared."

"But they do come back," said Nannie. "My Aunt Martha keeps bones with fresh meat on them, up in a tree near her back porch, all winter, and the birds come there in flocks."

"That must be a beautiful tree," observed Grace, "all hung with bones."

"You stop!" said Nannie. "It isn't 'all hung with bones.' She has them tied in so they don't show much; and they are *nice* bones."

"Lovely bones, beauteous bones, I have no doubt."

"I don't care," protested Nannie, a little teased. "It is real nice, and the birds come twittering around, as happy and thankful as can be. I think it is a great deal nicer than having birds in cages."

"So do I, Nannie," said Grace. "I shall have

a bone-tree if I ever settle in the country ; see if I don't."

"There is the bluebird picking up his crumbs, after all," said Virginia.

"Sure enough ! Come in here, Nell !" called Grace, as Helen Campbell went by the door. "'What do you think of that, my Cat ?'" waving her hand towards the grove.

"And 'what do you think of that, my Dog,' " responded Helen, holding up a little snow-ball she had gathered up on the window-sill, and was eating.

"Awful !—make you sick," striking it out of her hand on to Belle's head. There was screaming and shaking and brushing, but Belle's head was indestructible ; that is, her hair was that thick, soft, wavy growth, that cannot but be becoming, whatever happens to it.

"Do you notice the stone wall, Virgie ?"

"Yes ; it looks like a parapet of Pentelic marble ; at least I reckon it does. I don't know just what Pentelic marble is like—don't believe they could get such a curve on it as that, anyway."

"Come, you ought to look out of my windows," said Helen ; "you have n't seen my Norway spruces!"

New screams of delight burst from the group as they saw the clump of spruces, with their broad branches trailing to the earth under their load, and every bough, to the topmost spire, heaped with its silver treasure.

"How they taper against the sky," said Virginia, "and what a sky! It is as blue as the earth is white."

"This is a good day for the Jouffroy theory of the beautiful," remarked Helen to Grace.

"What's that?" asked Virginia.

"Don't, you seniors, get pedantic," cried Belle.

"Why, only," said Helen, replying to Virginia, and pinching Belle's ear, "that beauty is beautiful to us as the expression of something spiritual, immaterial. What a revelation of purity this dazzling blue-and-white day is."

"So it is," said Virginia, thoughtfully; "a revelation of God."

"Look!" cried one. "There's Patrick, making a path over to the Seminary!"

"See him quarry out his blocks," said Grace. "Pat is quite an artist in his way."

He cut out a square with his great wooden snow-shovel, then undermined it, and tossed it out of its bed.

‘ Only see the different shades of white !’ exclaimed Belle, with keen pleasure, as a shining cube was lifted on the broad spade, and tumbled over on to the glistening sheet of snow beside it.

“ How can the old sun remember to make a shadow for every tiny morsel of snow that breaks off and rolls away !”

“ There goes the breakfast-bell ! Good ! I’m hungry as a bear robbed of her whelps,” cried Nannie.

“ I did n’t know as bears lived on their whelps,” observed Grace, turning from the window.

“ You horrid girl ! You always squelch me if I come near you,” laughed Nannie.

At breakfast, usually a quiet meal, everybody was in jubilant spirits. At prayers, the chapter about the “ treasures of the snow ” was read, and thanks were given for the beauty of the world.

As the family came out of the breakfast-room, a cry of “ The snow-plough !” caused a grand rush to the front of the house to see the span of strong draught-horses struggle through the drift in the drive. Shovels had to be plied before they could make their way ; then the harrow-shaped plough came sweeping around, breaking the glis-

tening smoothness into all sorts of lights and shadows.

“ Lo, the conquering hero comes!
Beat the cymbals, sound the drums ! ”

sang Kate Campbell. “ Three cheers for the snow-plough that raises the siege ! ”

“ What a day for the boys ! ” exclaimed one.

“ And why not for the girls ? ” returned Kate. “ I am for a frolic in the snow. Who seconds the motion ? ”

“ I ! ” “ I ! ” Good ! ” “ Won’t it be gay ! ” sounded on every side.

“ If you go,” said Miss Douglass—“ and I think it is a good idea—you must be well equipped. Put on your gymnasium suits and rubber boots or leggins, cloaks, hoods, and mittens, if you are so well off as to have them.”

Those who shrunk from adventuring themselves, stood at the windows, and laughed to see the merry troop plunge into the drifts—push each other in—“ make angels ” in the snow—skirmish with snowballs. Most of them discharged their ammunition before it was half ready, and went wide of the mark; but the Campbells and Belle Stanton, having been pro-

perly educated by their brothers, delivered their missiles with fearful precision. What was wanting in skill, however, was made up in furor. Such chases and surprises—such washing of faces—such shouts and peals of laughter! Then what cheeks! What eyes! What thrilling life! What bounding young blood!

Who would have guessed the merry crowd belonged to that race, over whose sickliness a famous hygienist has lately expended pages of lamentation—the morbid, demoralized race of boarding-school girls!

“How red your cheeks are, Kate Cam!” said Alice Hazeltine, as they were stamping off the snow to come in.

“Are they?” asked Kate, whose great trial it was that she was not pretty. “I would keep a private snow-drift to roll in, the year round, if they would stay so. I tell you what, a March snow-storm is no bad joke!”

CHAPTER XV.

MAIL-TIME.



A VE the letters gone round?" "Is the mail distributed?" "Here comes Connie this minute!"

Half a dozen girls leaned over the balustrade.

"Come, Con, do hurry." "Don't be so deliberate!" "Got one for me?" "Oh, I know that yellow envelope—that's from my father."

By this time Connie was among them, her

hands full of letters and papers.

"Oh, give me one, that's a jew'!" Ambiguous,

but intended to be an abbreviated jewel. “‘Mehitable J. Stanton’—who is that?” Belle Stanton seizes the missive. “Is your name *Mehitable*? Oh, Belle! See if I don’t call you Hit. ‘Miss Virginia Raleigh’—that’s an elegant hand—do just let me see it again,” pulling it down for inspection. All heads bent over it for an instant. “What’s the post-mark? Cambridge. That’s a Harvard letter, I’ll warrant you.”

“Who in the world is this for?” exclaimed Connie Brewster. “What a looking thing! It must be for one of the servants.”

“Let us see!” shouted the whole chorus.

It was a rudely folded and refolded sheet, without an envelope, crumpled and soiled, as if it had been carried in a dirty pocket—the superscription straggling all over the back. “‘M-a-r-g’”—it is for Maggie McBride, as sure as you live! Oh, Maggie, that’s from some of your relations in Cor-r-rk!” “Do open it! Who can it be from?”

One of Maggie’s rustic admirers, no doubt.”

Alice Hazeltine snatched the letter and delivered it to poor Maggie, for her kind eyes had caught the flush of displeasure and pain on her face. “Young ladies,” she said, with mock authority, covering Maggie’s retreat to her room,

"how incorrigible you are! Only last Saturday, you were told to check your curiosity and not be peering at other people's letters. What good is it to talk to you, if you don't mind better than this?"

By this time Connie had broken away from the group, and her welcome tap was heard at door after door along the hall, often followed by a little scream of delight, as eager hands received "just the right letter."

Nannie White entertains a number of girls with copious extracts from her sister Fan's letter about the splendid wedding she has just attended, with minute descriptions of "dresses, too lovely for anything."

The Campbells revel in letters from the four quarters of the earth.

Belle Stanton bends eagerly over the contents of her yellow envelope, for Belle's father is her glory, and his letters are full of wit and wisdom.

Hortense Harvey knits her brows and tosses her head, as she reads her father's remarks that ten dollar bills don't grow on every bush, and he should really like to know what had become of the last money he sent her, that she wants more. And so on, with every measure of pleasure and

discontent, the various epistles are read ; but we are interested in only three of them.

As soon as Maggie McBride had turned the key on all intruders, she took her derided letter from her pocket and sat down in the little rocking-chair by the window to read it.

“ Poor father ! They sha’n’t laugh at you,” she said, as she tore it open. It was a wretchedly written page, but she was used to the hand, and read on quite steadily, till she came to the sentence :

“ I expect to hav to go down below week after next, to buy lether, etc.”—he was a harness-maker—“ and if I can I will stop and see you.”

Maggie was shocked at herself, that her heart sank at that sentence. How *could* she have him come ? And yet how heartless it seemed not to wish him to come. He was her own kind father, whom she loved, and for whom she would have done anything, but then he was—she knew it, and she could not help knowing it—a homely, illiterate, little old man, who talked bad grammar in a loud voice ; then he was so absurdly proud of her, he would be sure to put her to shame, by talking as if she was something wonderful. Only last week, Alice’s father, Judge

Hazeltine, had visited them—a courtly gentleman, who had been pronounced by all the girls “perfectly splendid.” He had treated her so politely, and taken her to ride with Alice in such a handsome turn-out—how could she introduce her poor, awkward, ignorant father, and have Alice secretly pitying her! Was there any way to prevent his coming? But her heart chided her for the thought, and she said to herself,

“He is my own father, and it is of more consequence whether he is made happy than what the girls think of me. He shall have a good time, at any rate. I am ashamed of myself.”

Meanwhile, just through the partition, Virginia Raleigh had been reading her Harvard letter. Girls came and rapped at her door, but got no answer. Then they rapped again and again, as if she were contumaciously opposed to opening the door, and sufficient rapping might bring her to a better mind. Still she gave no answer. She heard in the hall, “What *has* become of Virgie Raleigh? She won’t let me in,” and yet she did not open the door. At last the supper-bell rang. Hollyhock Tucker came, dashing down from the cupola, where she had been training a band of music with a jews-harp,

an harmonicon, and a fine-toothed comb, for instruments. She bolted into the room, shouting,

"I have had the tallest kind of a time! Come, Virgie, ain't you comin'?"

"No, Rose; tell Miss Douglass I want to be excused, please."

Rose stopped short. There was something odd in the sound of Virginia's voice.

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing! run or you will be late."

Poor Holly stood looking wistfully at her, her great round eyes filling with tears, and her rude face flushing with sympathy. Virginia was not crying; she said, "Oh, nothing," but Holly could see, plainly enough, there *was* something. She turned away, and went slowly down stairs, in much the same mood that a compassionate cow might turn away from a wounded oriole. If she only could do anything for her! She solaced herself by refusing to eat any supper, though there were coddled apples on the table, after which she secretly hankered, and afterwards by getting her room-mate's supper in superior style, with a white napkin over the tray, and toast and butter enough for a hungry savage, not to speak of a saucer of currant jelly, added by Kate Camp-

bell. What was more to the purpose, she had remarked to Miss Lincoln, on going down, that something awful was the matter of Virgie, she did n't know what, but she had had a letter, and the girls said she would n't let one of them in.

Miss Lincoln, thinking Virginia might need, at least, protection from inquiring friends, quietly left the table, when supper was nearly ended, and went up. A faint "Come," responded to her well-known tap.

"Do you want me, dear?" she asked, hesitating on the threshold, looking at the fearfully pale face.

Virginia stretched out her hand without speaking ; so her friend went to her and took it, offering gentle caresses, that said, "Here is sympathy for you, whenever you want it." She could see Virginia's lips pressed hard together with a proud, grieved look, and her eyes gazing out into the clouds that lowered heavily above the gorgeous sunset, as if night had already fallen in her soul. Her letter was crumpled in her clinched hand.

Suddenly, she seized it in both hands, twisted it, tore it, and, stamping her foot, burst out,
"I will not care!"

Just then, the sound of the evening hymn came up from the supper-room, fifty girlish voices, blended and softened by the distance, singing,

“Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow thee!”

Virginia leaned her head against Miss Lincoln, shivering, and her teeth chattering as if in an ague-fit.

“Oh, Miss Lincoln, it is Fred! he is so cruel.” At that came, at last, a few tears.

“‘*Fred*’ cruel to *you*, dear child?” kissing her tenderly, and folding her in her warm arms.

“He has no *right* to treat me so!” and again the passionate little hands crushed the fatal letter.

“Why, Virginia, I thought he was all devotion; and he has only just now won you.”

“Won me!” muttered the girl bitterly between her teeth. “And what do you think he has done with me?”

“Fred” had been the subject of several sunset confidences, before. He had met Virginia Raleigh in the summer, and had been quite fascinated by her, as gentlemen were apt to be. There had been an active flirtation for the three or four weeks they were at the beach together, fol-

lowed up by notes, bouquets, dainty confectionery boxes, until it had gone at last into urgent love-making.

Other people thought Fred Hallowell a good-looking, pleasant young fellow, without a great deal of character of any kind ; but Virginia was young, with a powerful imagination ; he was graceful, obliging, agreeable ; more than all, so desperately in love with her ! She gave her fancy *carte-blanche*, absence helped it on, and soon made up all deficiencies ; Fred's importunities prevailed, and though her parents forbade an engagement while she was a school-girl, Virginia considered it "just the same."

As Miss Lincoln had no idea what he had "done with her," she stood stroking her soft black hair, waiting for the explanation to come whenever it wanted to.

At length, leaning her head against her so as to hide her face, Virginia began :

" You know how I have begun to love the Saviour lately, and how I have begun to want to do something worth while in life. I have written to Fred about it, all along. He answered, at first, that he was glad if I was any happier, but I was good enough for him before. In another

letter, he said : ‘Don’t forget to pray for your graceless lover—Heaven knows he needs it!’ The last letter I wrote him, was last Sunday night. You remember that glorious sermon we had—‘Ye are not your own.’ I was all glowing with the idea, and I wrote him, just as I felt, about the earnest life we would live together ; how we would help each other, and what a blessing we would be to other people—and he has sent me *this!*”

“What is it, dear.”

“He says he sees I am too good for him ; that he is fond of gayety and excitement, and I think of nothing but being good and doing good ! So he is afraid we should never be happy together, and thinks we had better give it all up. Indeed, we *will* give it up !” she added, sitting up straight, as if she meant never to lean on any one any more.

“But how abrupt, Virginia ! Had he said anything of the kind before ?”

“Only two weeks ago, Miss Lincoln, he was writing me that I could do anything with him I chose, I was his good angel, and all that. Now, he hopes I may be as happy as I deserve, and bless some man more worthy of me than he !”

She repeated the words scornfully, but her friend sincerely responded to them.

"So do I, Virginia. It is well this has come, if the unequal yoke galled so much already. You will bear it bravely, I know." Virginia winced, that she, proud, courted, exclusive Virginia Raleigh, should have *such* a thing to bear. "Pride would carry you through, but that would leave you hard and bitter and cold. Let the Saviour's love heal the wound, and it will leave you more gentle, sympathetic and strong. Take the comfort that it is really for Christ's sake. Carry it all to Him; believe that He knows all the ache and the smart of it, and yet He let it come, and He knows how to make it good to you. Would you rather have His love and this, or have kept Fred without Him?"

"I would rather have it as it is," said Virginia. "I can never be disappointed in HIM."

Just then a clatter of dishes was heard along the hall, and Holly threw open the door, quite beaming with the sense of bringing relief for the unknown sorrow on a tea-tray. Poor Holly-hock! when did she ever cross a room without finding a snare laid for her feet! She stumbled over a hassock and came down, toast, tea, jelly

and all, in one red burial blent. It was pitiful to see the fall in her exultant visage, but, after all, it was the best way the supper could have been served, as it brought Virginia to her feet and gave her something to do.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAGGIE'S FORTUNES.



A GGIE'S father came. Florence Hare having taken an observation over the balusters, reported him the shrivelledest scrap of an old man.

As long as she was alone with him, Maggie took great comfort in seeing him and talking over all the home news. She did not mind it if he did tip his chair back against the wall and

murder English. When he proposed she should show him 'round town, it was something of a

trial to walk out of the drive with the shabby, queer little figure, feeling that a battery of eyes from all the front windows was levelled upon them; but her heart went down in despair when he accepted Miss Douglass's invitation to dinner. School girls are more critical than their betters—begging their pardon—nobody can be "nice" with them who does not come up to the mark in personal appearance. Maggie's whole soul shrunk from putting up her poor father to be gazed at and commented on by all those girls. She thought with a pang how Alice had urged *her* father to stay to dinner, how easily and delightfully he had entertained the young ladies about him, what a little crowd had gathered around Alice afterward, congratulating her on having such a princely-looking father, "such a perfect gentleman."

Whatever misgivings Maggie had, her father did not share them. He shovelled his potatoe into his mouth by the knife-full, gazing around the room with complacency, and remarking in a high, piping voice to Miss Douglass that she had quite a sight of young women to provide for. How many bushels of potatoes did she calculate they consumed in a year? He asked, "What ye

got here?" when the maccaroni was passed him, and declined sugar on his *blanc-mangé*, on the ground that he had been consid'able bilious 'long in the spring, late years.

When his appetite was allayed and he pushed back his chair, spreading a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief across his knees and commenced picking his teeth, Maggie trembled; she knew he would get loquacious. She could see eyes, eyes, eyes all over the room turned in that direction. Her gentle spirit waxed indignant. Why could n't the girls keep their eyes at home?

Her wretchedness reached its climax when she heard her father saying to Miss Douglass,—

"Wal, I s'pose you can't learn my Maggie much more. She always was a great hand for books. I did n't think it was no use—her gettin' any more schoolin'—she's been now more'n any of the rest of the young folks round our neighborhood; but I s'pose she wanted to be to the top of the heap, and her mother, nothin' wcould do but she must come here to school. But it's dreadful expensive. I tell her she must make up her mind to begin earnin' instead of spendin' fore long."

Maggie never felt more thankful to any human

being than she did to Miss Douglass, who had the tact to turn the conversation at this point and occupy the time with quite a long story of her own adventures in travelling through Mr. McBride's part of the country.

He took leave soon after dinner, and his daughter fled to her own room to hide her mortification. But it did not prove a refuge. Loud voices came up the open register from the room below. She heard one girl asking,—

“Where on earth did Miss Douglass rake up that old codger she had at dinner?” and another reply,—

“Why, don't you know, that was Mag McBride's father.”

“Good gracious! If I had such an old wisp of a father as that, I would keep him at home.”

“Oh, *did* you see him stick his knife in the butter?” asked a third. “I ate my bread dry after that—should if it had choked me.”

“What a comical, squeaking voice he has!” said No. 4. “I thought I should have died to hear him talk. *Did* you mind what he said about Maggie's being ‘at the top of the heap’?”

“What was it?” “Do tell it.”

No. 4 repeated, with only too perfect mimicry,

the whole speech. A shriek of laughter followed, and Maggie's cheeks burned like live coals, as she heard sentences repeated over and over and joked about, amid shouts of laughter.

"Well, I declare, I pity her," exclaimed one.

"Pity! My senses! I never would show my head in this house again if a relation of mine were to make such an exhibition of himself. You would see my trunks starting for the very next train, I—tell—you!"

"I don't care! Maggie behaved splendidly," exclaimed another. "She was just as polite and attentive to him as if he had been something to be proud of."

"Perhaps she did n't realize but that he was."

"Realize! I should rather think she did! I sat the opposite side of the table and I saw her color rise. She looked as if she would go straight through the floor if he went on much longer."

"I should desire to if I was in her place," replied the other, in a contemptuous tone.

Maggie had heard quite enough. She pressed her hands over her ears to shut it all out. She was sensitive to a fault, and she felt crushed to the earth with shame. She dreaded to see Alice; and for that matter, Alice dreaded to come home

to the room. What could she say? Congratulation would sound like mockery, condolence would be an insult, and silence would be a confession that the case did not admit of anything said. Maggie had expressed so much admiration for her father, and what could she say in return! Alice was, as she lamented, "a middling person." She was good-looking without being handsome, a fair but not superior scholar, an agreeable but not brilliant talker, a respectable but not fine player; but, despite this mediocrity she chafed under, there were few more desirable room-mates or every-day companions than Alice. To be sure, she never startled you with wit, but she never tired you with nonsense. She had good common sense, a pleasant disposition, and a knack of doing obliging things in the right time and way.

When she did come back to her room she found Maggie looking so excited and harassed that she made her sit down in her lap and listen while she gave quite a full description of her own experiences for the day; then she asked,—

"What word did you get from your mother? I know I should just love that mother of yours, Maggie, she does write such lovely letters. You

will have to take me home with you some vacation for I never shall be satisfied till I see her."

Maggie had to wink hard to keep back the tears, she saw through Alice's delicate kindness so plainly. She had been vainly wishing it could have been her mother instead of her father. Not that she was better educated or had seen more of the world, but she had a native refinement and loveliness of spirit that made her essentially a lady. It was her own longing for knowledge and aptitude for culture which made her crave for her child advantages which the father saw no need of. Maggie loved to talk about her, and, before she knew it, Alice had beguiled her into telling all about her brother Nat, and the younger children and the hill behind the house where she used to search for the first May flowers, and the trout brook where she used to wade about on the rocks and mottled pebbles. She was quite happy again ; but as soon as she went out among the other girls, she fancied some of them looked askance at her, and others pityingly.

That night, Alice was wakened with a start from sound sleep. Her eyes snapped open, and there sat Maggie in her night-dress on the win-

dow sill of the open window, with the moon-light streaming over her. Her first impulse was to call to her that she would fall out, that she would catch her death cold, but in an instant she took in the situation.

“Sleep-walking,” little white feet dangling out of a third story window. If she was suddenly waked, she would be sure to fall. That moment she was saying,

“There is a nice broad rock. Wonder if I can jump on to that.”

She thought she was by the trout brook at home—she would jump!

Quick and silent as thought, Alice sprang to her side and clasping her arms firmly around her, before she spoke, said,

“Come, Maggie, come in!”

Even that did not waken her, but only changed the current of her fancies.

“I could n’t stay any longer, Natty. The girls despised me. I am so glad to be here with you. Let’s jump on to that big rock and paddle in the brook. I am so warm.”

She tried to spring and Alice had all she could do to hold her. She was small but strong.

“You are not half so strong as you used to be,

Natty," said Maggie with a low, gurgling laugh, "I don't believe you can hold me."

In terror lest she should try it, Alice said in a loud, positive tone,

"Come into the house, Maggie, come! Mother wants you. Come!"

Without a word, she turned her gentle little face, with its cloud of golden hair, away from the moonlight, and throwing her arms around Alice's neck, climbed in the window, and suffered herself to be led back to bed. Alice, shivering with horror at the danger escaped, shut the window and locked it, crept in beside her unconscious friend, and soon they were both asleep. In the morning, Maggie was aching with a fresh cold, and for several days she went about, half sick—feverish, nervous, quite unlike her usual tranquil, cheerful self.

Alice gave an animated description of the adventure of the night, the next morning, at breakfast. The young ladies about her listened eagerly, and the little seed sprang up in a large crop of stories. Each had some extraordinary incident to contribute, and, for a few days after that, you might be pretty sure, wherever you saw a group of girls listening to one of their number,

that the mysterious charms of somnambulism, spiritualism, haunted houses and ghostly visions held them spell-bound. They grew afraid to look over their shoulders, or go about the house alone, after night-fall,

About a week later Miss Douglass had taken Miss Hare, Miss Raleigh, and a few other music scholars into the city to hear some fine music, intending to return the next morning. Alice had been regaling Maggie, after the "retiring bell," on the last fearful ghost story, and had gone comfortably to sleep after relieving herself of it. The whole house was still. It was strange how quickly the tide of young life that had filled it with music and laughter ebbed away into silence and oblivion.

Suddenly, a sharp, terrible shriek cut through the darkness—then a rustling and a stifled sound of malicious laughter.

Scores of eyes flew open. Scores of girls started up from sleep—hearts beating hard and fast, and said to each other, "What *was* that?" "What an *awful* cry!"

Doors were opened—heads put timidly out and the whisper went around,

"What *is* the matter?" to get only the answer,

"Oh I don't know; I believe somebody is killed!"

Miss Lincoln had sprung to her feet, the moment that fearful scream tore through her sleep; she struck a light, threw on a wrapper and hurried along the hall towards the spot from which it seemed to come—Alice and Maggie's room. As she passed along, girls were asking from their doors, "What is it? Oh, what *is* it, Miss Lincoln?" and she answered, "I don't know. Get into bed and I will tell you, when I know."

The door of the room stood open, she went in and shut it behind her. Alice was sitting up in bed, deadly pale and shaking with fright. Maggie lay still as a statue, with her eyes fixed.

"Oh, Miss Lincoln!" exclaimed Alice, clutching at her wrapper and hiding her face in her bosom, "What *was* it?" with a shiver.

"That is what I came to ask you," said Miss Lincoln. "I thought the cry came from your room."

"It did. It was Maggie. It woke me and I saw a tall, white figure—oh, frightfully tall!—just going out of the door."

"Wasn't it imagination? Hadn't you been reading ghost stories?"

"Ah, no! I saw it as plain as day. You see how the moonlight lies in the room. Besides, just as it went out, it overturned that little easel on the table. See!"

"Ah, yes! That is a kind of ghost, I understand. Cruel!—Maggie! Maggie, dear!"

She laid her hand on Maggie's face—patted her cheek—called close to her ear, but she lay still as death, her affrighted eyes gazing into vacancy, fixed as stone.

"Rub her other hand, Alice. Try to rouse her," said Miss Lincoln, briskly chafing one of her lifeless hands. By this time, Miss Hurd had reached the spot, and two or three of the more courageous girls. Cologne and camphor and rubbing were tried to the utmost; still Maggie lay senseless. Only close watching could detect now and then a flickering breath. More girls came stealing into the room and stood awe-struck. Panic spread through the house. Girls huddled together in each other's rooms asking, without any answer, "Is she dying?" "What could it have been?"

To go back a little in the course of things: the Campbells' room was directly opposite Maggie McBride's. Helen had not quite gone

to sleep when her attention was caught by a slight rustle in the hall and the impression that some one had gone into the opposite room. The next moment, Maggie's cry of horror broke out. She started up and saw distinctly the ghostly figure of preternatural height, come out and glide swiftly away. She heard the suppressed laugh under the white drapery and thought she recognized it. She sprang to her door just in time to see the spectre disappear in Holly Tucker's room. Sense and courage never failed Helen. She instantly followed and found in the middle of the floor, a medley composed of two sheets, a pillow, a broom, and a Hollyhock, quaking with laughter. She seized the girl by the shoulders and gave her a little shake, saying,

"Holly Tucker, are n't you ashamed of yourself, to go frightening honest folk out of their senses this way?"

"My stars! How she did yell!" exclaimed Holly, hardly able to speak for laughing. "I declare she scared me 'bout 's much 's I did her. I was goin' to make a few more calls, but she finished my career."

"It is a cruel shame to frighten anybody so,"

said Helen, full of honest wrath, still half laughing to see Holly dismantle her frightful apparition.

"Mercy! I sha'n't get this undone before the teachers'll be upon me.. Here, can't you untie this string?"

In two or three minutes the "spook" was resolved into its elements ; the broom was in the closet and Holly between the sheets, with her head on the pillow, giggling over her unexpected success.

Then Helen went to Maggie, thinking to relieve her fears, but found the room full of anxious, whispering people, with that little pale, lifeless figure in the midst. She drew Miss Lincoln aside, and told her the secret of the fright.

" You did bravely, Helen. Now I wish you would go quietly to every room, where the young ladies are awake, and tell them what it was, and that Maggie was frightened into a kind of swoon. Tell every one to go to bed ; and say that we think there is no danger. If any one is needed, we will let her know. Now, girls," she said in a low, but cheery tone, turning to the little crowd gathered in the room, " it is best to have just as few about as can take care of Maggie. She needs

the purest air, and when she comes to herself there must be nothing to excite her. Kate, please take Alice into your room and try to have her go to sleep. If you feel able, Grace, I should like you to stay and help us ; and if Maggie does not get better quite soon, I should be glad to have two of you go for the doctor ; Mrs. Clark says Patrick has gone to a wake."

Several offered their services, quite willing to go, not only for love of Maggie, but for the novelty of being in the deserted streets at midnight. Others slunk away, whispering to each other that they would n't go for any money.

Meanwhile, Helen went on her errand, and by her calm, matter-of-fact explanation, quieted the excitement. She escorted to their own apartments several girls who had fled for protection to some cooler school-mate, and promised some of Maggie's best friends that she would come again with news from her.

Then she went to Rose Tucker's room, and told her the effect of her little joke. She listened with great eyes that slowly filled with water, and began to shed large drops, as Helen described how helpless and pale Maggie lay, with fixed, staring eyes.

"Oh, *do* you s'pose she will die? I didn't mean to scare her like that. I never thought it would hurt her any. I only did it for fun."

After Helen left her, she heard Holly crying so loud, that she had to go back and charge her to keep still. But her weeping and wailing could not undo the mischief she had done.

The physician came quickly, and after examining his unconscious patient, asked if her nervous system had not received some great shock, which had thrown her into this comatose state. Stimulants were tried, within and without. The brandy and water put between her lips she slowly, mechanically swallowed, her tender feet recoiled a little from the hot draughts bound upon them, and it seemed as if she must be coming back; but the consciousness would not venture from its hiding-place, the eyelids never closed over that steady stare.

There was something fearful about it;—she was such a meek little creature, her limbs were so passive in their hands; the pale face, with its halo of golden hair, was so pitiful in its mute appeal. What did those blue eyes see, peering into mystery? Had those perfect ears forgotten, so suddenly, how to hear? Where was the

gentle spirit, that it would not heed nor answer the familiar voices, though they called never so lovingly? All night they hung over her. Sometimes it seemed as if she was done breathing—then their straining ears would catch a slow, faint sigh.

When Miss Douglass came home, next morning, with her bevy of happy girls, they found an undefinable atmosphere of anxiety about the house, felt even before they entered it. Every one was moving about softly and looking sober. When Virginia Raleigh went to her room, she found Holly in deep dejection.

"If you hadn't gone away," she said, "this never would have happened. You see, you can't stay away a single night, but what I'm up to some iniquity."

Bells rang ; scores of footsteps went and came; sunshine poured over the world ; breakfast, dinner, supper, went by, still, in that solemn chamber, Maggie kept her silent watch with unflinching eyes.

By sunrise that morning, a telegram had brought darkness and fear into the little brown house by the trout brook :

"Maggie is sick; please come at once."

There was hurried consultation. The father had just got home—it was decided the mother and brother should go. With tremulous fingers and sick heart, but wise mother-foresight, Mrs. McBride made what preparation an hour allowed, and left the little children crying, to take the first train.

All the way, Nat tried to keep up his mother's spirits; Maggie would be better when they got there—she couldn't be *very* sick so suddenly—she was well and hearty when father saw her, only a week ago.

He could not help noticing and being interested in everything by the way, while his mother's heart chided the slow engine and thought of nothing, cared for nothing but her sick child.

By twilight they reached Grattan, and were met at the door of Thornton Hall by Miss Douglass with the welcome words: "Maggie is no worse." She told them briefly the state of the case, then took them up. The mother seemed relieved to get where she could see her darling was alive and kiss her cheek and stroke her hair and let her tears rain over her, but Nat stood behind, his great brown eyes wonder-struck. It

was one thing to hear Maggie was sick, another to see her like that !

“ Let me try, mother,” he said, when she had spent upon her child caresses and pet names in vain. She gave way, and he sank on one knee beside the bed, taking one of his sister’s helpless little hands in his—large, strong, dark.

“ Maggie!” he called in a cheerful, confident voice. She did not stir nor turn her eyes.

“ Maggie! Maggie, dear! It’s *Natty*.” The poor fellow said it as if she surely would wake up if she only could understand it was Natty. Still she did not mind him more than if she had never known the name.

“ Oh, Maggie, speak to me! Maggie! Maggie! Maggie!” he cried, catching her to his breast, trembling from head to foot, his ruddy brown cheek blanched with pain. He laid her back on her pillow and buried his face in his hands with a great groan. But there came a faint flickering of life over the motionless face, the soul seemed to creep timidly forward and take a peep through the eyes; the lips quivered like a grieved child’s; the fingers closed over the mother’s hand, and Maggie whispered in a scared, imploring way,—

“ Don’t let it get me!”

"Get you!" cried Nat, in a transport; "I should think not. Bless your heart, nothing shall ever get *you*."

Slowly the fear changed to a pleased surprise, in the waking blue eyes. She looked at her mother, then at her brother, then back again. Gradually a smile began at her mouth and spread all over her face.

"Mother—Natty."

Her mother kissed her and patted her and called her fond names. Natty sat beaming on her out of his laughing brown eyes.

Gradually her look travelled around to the foot of the bed, where Miss Douglass stood, smiling, with her eyes full of tears. Maggie did not know nor care what it all meant, it was "nice" to be taking gruel from her mother's hand and have Nat hold up her head, and Miss Douglass stand there looking so happy.

The word went around the house like wild-fire, that Maggie had "come to." There was general rejoicing, but perhaps nobody else was quite so happy over it as Hollyhock Tucker. After she had run all over the premises to tell the news, she rushed down to a fruit store and spent the last penny of her week's allowance for oranges

and lemons, which she begged Virginia to take to Maggie's door, "only be sure not to let her know who sent them." As the family came down to breakfast the next morning, Holly appeared from scouring the woods, a mile away, her face red, her hair dishevelled and her dress torn, with her hands full of violets and partridge vines. She did not care anything about them, but she knew Maggie did.

All that day the opening of the door or the rustle of garments in the hall would bring a startled expression to Maggie's face, but she would look up to her mother or her stalwart brother and ask, in her child-like way, "You will take care of me, won't you?"

As soon as the doctor gave it as his opinion that all was going well, so that time and nourishment would bring back his patient's strength, Mrs. McBride felt obliged to go home to the little ones she had left so suddenly, leaving Nat to visit relatives in the region and wait until it was clear whether Maggie would be able to stay. So it happened that the business of nursing her fell in good part to her school-mates, who developed all degrees of capacity for that womanly art.

Miss Hurd seemed to be the sick one's guardian angel. Many a girl found, when it grew dark in her experience, that Miss Hurd came out like a star; and then she had always had a special fondness for Maggie as a genuine, sensible little thing, without any pretence.

"Which of the girls will you have for nurse to-day?" she asked one morning.

"I love to have Alice better than any one else," answered Maggie, "but I don't want her to-day; she has done so much for me I am afraid she will get sick. Anybody, Miss Hurd; I am so sorry to be such a trouble."

"You are not a trouble, child. Any of them would be glad to come. Take your choice. Grace Fanshaw?"

"I am a little bit afraid of her," said Maggie, shyly.

"How about Kate Campbell, then? You are not afraid of her."

"No, but she talks and gets me to laughing till I cry, and when she goes away I am all tired out."

"Helen would n't do that."

"No; she is a good nurse and knows just what to do without asking; but I can't help feeling as if her time was too precious."

"What do you say to Florence Hare?" asked Miss Hurd, laughing. "Her time is n't over-valued."

"Florence is as kind-hearted as she can be, but she keeps asking if there is n't something she can do; and if I stir she looks frightened, as if I was going into a fit or something."

"I think we shall have to add a year to the course, to teach the art and mystery of nursing," said Miss Hurd. "How would you like Belle Stanton?"

"She's nice. She does things just right, without fussing. She doesn't think she has got to entertain me, and she doesn't hush me up if I venture to speak, either. Yes, I think I like her next to Alice. It is enough to make one feel better to see her about, she looks so fresh and sweet.

"But there's one thing, Miss Hurd"—Maggie hesitated, and the pale pink came into her cheeks—"I thought may be—do you suppose—perhaps it's just a notion, but I didn't know but Holly Tucker would like to take care of me just a little while."

"You want to let her come in and torment you with her blundering ways, so as to make her feel

more comfortable about scaring you nearly to death, you dear, silly, little soul!" said Miss Hurd, winking back a tear, an unwonted intruder in her eyes. "No, you can't have that privilege, if I did tell you you might take your choice. She would work you into a fever in less than half an hour."

"But she sends the wild-flowers, you know, and feels so sorry. I don't want her to worry about it; she didn't mean any harm."

"But she *did* a deal of harm, and she shall do no more to you if I can help it," said Miss Hurd, who had not much sympathy for wrong-doers, it must be confessed. "I will tell her you proposed it, and that will answer every purpose."

It was some days later that Nannie White was allowed to stay with the invalid, as she was considerably better, while the family were at supper.

Miss Hurd came up before any one else and quickened her steps as she heard sounds of distress from the sick-room. Maggie lay gasping, moaning with every breath, while Nannie stood cowering a little way off, wringing her hands, gazing at her in horror and crying, "Oh, Maggie, don't! Oh, Maggie, don't!"

Miss Hurd took her severely by the two shoulders and walked her off, remarking, "If you have n't more sense than that, the sooner you are out of this room the better."

Some hours of good nursing brought Maggie right, but convinced her friends she had little power of endurance yet. Nannie had been considerate enough to ask her all about the fright and so had got her wrought into hysterics.

As days went on it became evident that she would not soon be able to bear either excitement or exertion. Her physician pronounced it out of the question for her to undertake school duties again for that term at least. Among her native hills she might regain her vigor, but it was likely to be a work of months.

It was not without sorrowful tears that Maggie accepted this decision.

"I would n't mind it," she said to Alice, "if I could ever come again, but I knew this must be my last term and I was going to do so much!"

"But you shall come again, dearie. You are

going to be all well by fall."

"Oh, yes; I hope so—all well, but that is n't it, Hazie; father can't afford to send me any longer, he thought he could n't any way, and now the

doctor's bills and the travelling expenses will be added.

"Sometimes I think I will earn enough to send myself to school, but by the time I got it earned, I suppose I should be too old to come. Nat is going to educate himself. He works summers and goes to school winters. He is almost ready for college now. He thinks he can get in next fall, and he is sure he can make his way through. Nat can, if anybody can," her soft eyes lightening with sisterly pride. "He says there are scholarships in the colleges for those that need them, and are promising students; everybody says Nat is promising. Then he says there are always ways that a fellow who isn't afraid of work can help himself, as he goes along; vacations he can always be earning, and if he should have to, he can stay out a year, and make a good lot.

"But there are so few things a girl can do," said Maggie, a cloud coming over her hopeful face. "And what you can do, doesn't count up much. Our schooling costs as much as theirs, and more, too, and there are no scholarships for us, as there are for them. We can't help ourselves, and nobody helps us."

"I know it; people are always giving to colleges; they have libraries and cabinets and apparatus—why, no more than they need, of course, or ought to have—but why does n't somebody think that may be girls' minds need some help, too? Who thinks of bequeathing their thousands to improve any *girls'* school? If they do any thing of the sort, they found a new seminary that they can put their name to."

"If I was a boy, I would have an education, I know," said Maggie, with a deep sigh.

"When my ship comes in, I will endow this seminary with a fund to help along promising girls that need it."

"I wish it would hurry," said Maggie, smiling sadly. "I shall try to make the most of myself I can, but I do not expect much more help about it."

Alice wanted to say she wished she might make as much of herself with help, as Maggie would without, but gave it up, feeling she should break down if she tried.

A good many tears were shed when Maggie got into the coach to go away, and laid her pale little face on Nat's broad shoulder. She smiled and kissed her hand to the crowd of friends o

the veranda, as a turn of the drive took her away from their sight, and nobody but Alice and Miss Hurd knew that she meant it for a last good-by to school.

"Too bad, ain't it?" said Sue Carter, indifferently, to the school-mate next to her.

"Too bad she can't have half the chance some girls throw away," said Miss Hurd, almost fiercely, as she passed.

"What's all that for?" asked Sue, opening her pale eyes on her companion. She had no idea, of course she could not have, how Miss Hurd's honest heart was seething with the query, why bread should be taken from the hungry, and forced on those who have neither appetite nor digestion for it.

The Principal made Maggie's sickness the text for a little sermon on the cruelty of amusing oneself by practicing on the timidity of another. "To be sure, the consequences may rarely be so serious as in this case," she said, "but you can never tell in how sensitive a state another may be. Life demands of women, as well as men, firm nerves and a brave heart. It is a ruinous mistake to waste on fearful stories, ghostly experiments, or useless tamperings with the circle of mystery

that bounds our life, the courage and coolness we shall need for better things."

A few days later, Miss Douglass said to Miss Hurd, as she glanced over a letter she had just received :

" Is n't this good ? I think I have found the right place for Rose Tucker at last. It is in a private family in the country, with a good day-school, a mile and a half away, which she can attend. It is a household of kind-hearted, sensible, jovial sort of people ; I think they can furnish her safety-valves enough to make her a safely running engine."

So Holly left the Seminary for the Seminary's good, and her own as well, yet not in disgrace, by any means. She was followed by good wishes and a half-laughing regret from everybody at Thornton Hall ; and whoever recalled her boisterous, untimely, ridiculous performances, always ended with, " But what a good-hearted creature she was ! "

CHAPTER XVII.

MISS ATHERTON.



HE teacher with the light hair and hazel eyes"—as new scholars were apt to distinguish her—sat one evening in her room, with a pile of compositions in her lap and a pencil in her hand, but her heart aching too hard for work.

An awful sense of desolation and loneliness shut down upon her like midnight. Only two little years ago, the world was bright and full, and now—a waste, howling wilderness. It was a strange two years, to come

in anybody's life. There had not been time to recover from one calamity, before another had pressed upon it. First, her dear, only sister, had married a man whom she could neither like nor approve ; then her wayward brother, whom their father, hoping to interest in business, had taken into partnership, had played fast and loose until the credit of the honorable old house was destroyed, and her father so heart-broken that he had fairly gone distracted and taken his own life. Her mother, always delicate, never rallied from that shock, and she had lovéd her well enough to be thankful when she saw her sweet eyes closed forever, and the cross, too heavy to be borne, laid down.

Then the home was broken up. Furniture, horses, piano, pictures, all the sacred old treasures, were sold at auction—the home became a house, and strangers lived in it. She, who had been petted and sheltered all her life, and never lacked for anything money or love could bestow, was thrown on her own resources. The brother, who should have been her support, was her bitterest grief. The sister, who had been quite estranged from the family by their disapproval of her marriage, had come nearer, indeed, in the

sorrow, but she was not as she used to be, and her husband was most odious to Miss Atherton when he was most friendly. He was a man to whom she could never put herself under any obligation.

How often she blessed her father and mother that, in simply trying to make her a cultivated woman, thoroughly furnished unto every good work, they had provided her with just what she needed in her extremity—a fine education.

She had the manners and culture of a lady, with a gentle dignity of character which attracted and influenced her pupils, yet in one requisite for a good teacher she was wanting : the work was distasteful to her. She was living a double life. She tried to be kind to the young ladies, to see that they were well instructed, to fulfil all her duties ; but her real life was far away, in the happy past, in the desolate home, brooding over her half-ruined brother, yearning for her stolen sister, foreboding the dreary future. The mirth of the girls seemed strange to her, and their troubles petty. Her own life had suddenly plunged into such a deep, dark chasm, that she wondered to hear theirs still babbling over golden sands. In Connic

Brewster's case, her whole interest had been roused by the feeling that an immortal destiny was trembling in the balance, but when she began to feel at rest about her, she relapsed into an inner self-absorption along with an outward fidelity that never failed. She loved to be alone, that she might drop her enforced cheerfulness and be her own sad self.

On this particular evening, the bitterness of bereavement and anxiety had overwhelmed her. Her daily routine of service had looked so mechanical, so alien to her thoughts, she loathed it. What did she care whether the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle was equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides or not? What use was it to spend her vital force in drilling facts into dull minds or curbing coltish spirits? "What a weariness it is!" she groaned from the bottom of her heart. A tap at the door broke in on her sad thoughts. She said, "Come,"—thought, "Stay away."

Connie Brewster appeared with an Algebra and slate. Miss Atherton inwardly groaned, but said politely,

"What is it? Can I help you?"

"I am sorry to trouble you, Miss Atherton,

but I cannot do a thing with this twentieth example. I have been puzzling over it, all the evening."

"Sit down," said the teacher, drawing a chair to her side, "and let us see what can be done."

She read the problem and stated its first conditions;

"You see that?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She went a few steps farther;

"You understand?"

"Sort of," said Connie, hesitatingly.

Miss Atherton drew a deep breath for a fresh start, but the young girl suddenly dropped her head in her lap, and burst into tears.

"Why, my poor child, what is the matter?" asked the teacher, in quick sympathy, laying her hand on her head.

"I can't think, I can't follow what you say, I can't do anything—I have had such an awful letter!" and then came another outburst that seemed as if it would shake the little body to pieces.

Miss Atherton tried to comfort her as well as she could without knowing what the matter was, and at last it came out, with a volley of sighs

and tears, that Connie's mother was on the point of marrying again.

"Poor dear papa! I cannot have that horrid man in his place. I never will go home again—never. I don't see how my mother *could*!"

"You are sure you can't like the gentleman she is going to marry?"

"Why—I never saw him—but I know I should hate him. Of course, I should. It is so horrid of him to go and spoil our lovely home!"

Miss Atherton smiled to herself over the head still buried in her lap, and said,

"I remember seeing your mother, Connie, when she brought you to school, and I can not blame any one much for loving her. But I do pity you, dear. I can understand very well how dreadful it must be to you to think of any one else in your father's place; then, of course, you have been everything to your mother, since his death."

That touched the wound to the quick.

"Oh, I know it! She used to say I was all her comfort, and now she writes what Mr. Hale thinks, and what Mr. Hale wants, and how kind Mr. Hale is, and what Mr. Hale does for her, and

she does n't care any more about me. I wish I was with poor papa!"

"Is that true, Connie—do you believe she does n't care any more about you?" asked her friend, softly.

"Why no—not exactly—but it is so different!"

"So it is, I know," said Miss Atherton tenderly. For a few minutes she sat, thinking sadly, stroking the bonnie brown hair so gently that peace and consolation distilled from her fingers. Connie felt that her grief was understood and taken to heart; that made it more tolerable. At last, Miss Atherton said,

"I want to tell you something, Connie, and you must not think I do not feel for you, because I say it; for I do, to the bottom of my heart; you believe that, don't you?" A quick pressure of the hand was the answer.

"Well then," she went on, "you love your mother, you want her to be happy, you meant to make her so, if you could." The hand responded again. "But you could not do all. She feels that she shall be happier with some one else to love, too,—some one to share her life, and care for her, as you could not, dear, with all your

love. Then, one of these years, you will probably be marrying, yourself. When that time comes, you would think it very unkind if your mother made a terrible ado and protested against your loving anybody but her. Now, it would be just as unfair for you to make her unhappy, as it would be for her to make you so. Of course, your mother ought to consult your welfare and happiness as well as her own; and so should you do for her, if you should ever wish to marry. From what I know of your mother, I think she would be likely to do that, don't you?"

"Oh, she always did do everything to make me happy."

"And so, I believe, you will find she has tried to, this time. See if she has not thought of you all along, and meant to give you a kind friend and protector."

"Oh she writes like that, but *I don't want him!*" with an impatient gesture. "I want my own, dear, blessed father, or nobody—and I should think she would!"

"Honor thy mother, dear child. Do not judge her. Never doubt that she loved your father quite as much as you did; you will have

to leave it to her, whether any one else can fill his place to her, at all. It is her right to decide that, and if she decides, Yes, then try to make the best of it. There is a long, bright future before you, I hope. Try to think of her, more than of yourself. Think how lonely it has been for her since you have been away, and how lonely it might be, in the future. You may see the time you will be only too thankful there is some one to cherish her, besides you. Do your part, and the home may be yet pleasanter than it is now. Of course, Mr. Hale can never be to you like your own dear father—no one expects that—but he may be a great help to you, and you may be a great delight to him."

Constance shook her pretty head incredulously, but her tears were stayed.

"Then, dear, one thing more; never forget that God is your Father, that He loves you, even more than your own dear papa ever did. Tell Him everything, trust Him, love Him, ask His counsel and try to do just as He tells you,

"'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him.'"

The young girl threw her arms around her friend's neck, saying,

"You don't know how much good you have done me. I think I can be quite decent now. If poor mother will be any happier, I am sure I am willing.

"I believe I can manage the Algebra now," she said with a rueful sort of smile, as she picked up her book and slate. "I was too wretched to study. Give me a good-night kiss, and I'll go."

As the door closed upon her, Miss Atherton sank back in her chair and shed soft tears of gratitude and joy. Her Saviour had found out a balm for her wound, the power of comforting others. It was a little incident, but it turned the current of her thoughts. The life of a boarding-school teacher, that had seemed such a tedious, thankless round, rose beautiful and holy before her.

What if home was lost for her? Here was the chance to make many homes happy. She thought over all her life in school—how scrupulously exact she had been in every engagement, and yet how her real self had been absent. She thought of the young creatures around her, going forward in their gay unconsciousness to meet suffering just as real and terrible as hers—duties great enough to strain every fibre of

their power. Every day was telling on their future and on all the lives to be interlaced with theirs. Here was surely enough to live for.

She had been giving these girls her time, her strength, her knowledge, her mental power, but she had not given them herself. She had often wished she were in a day-school where she would not need to have anything to do with them except in the class-room. Now, the fidelity with which she had satisfied herself seemed poor and superficial ; she had not been faithful to the sacred trust of character and happiness confided to her.

Here were all these girls—separated from mother and sister, father and brother, spending, many of them, three or four years out of the heart of their youth—and they needed not merely to be taught the 'lore of books or elegant accomplishments ; they needed contact with strong character and warm hearts, comfort in their first sharp trials, help in their first fierce temptations, nurture in the love of God and the graces of the Spirit.

"What great matter whether I am happy or not," she said to herself. "Even Christ pleased

not Himself; I can be a fellow-laborer together with Him."

She began to deny herself the melancholy luxury of grief; to lay down both sorrow and care at her Saviour's feet, and throw herself heartily into the hopeful young life around her.

As the girls blessed her for bringing heavenly help in their sorest need, they little dreamed what loss and desolation had made her heart "at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize," neither could they know how their daily love and kindness helped to heal the deep old wounds, nor how their cheer and hope flowed in to fill the empty life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BELLE STANTON'S VIGIL.



NE afternoon, late in May, as Belle came in from her afternoon walk, she stopped at Miss Douglass's room.

"I have been down to my washerwoman's," she said, as she took the seat offered her, "to see why she has n't sent home my white pique. I went prepared to give her a good scolding, I have wanted it so these bright days, but you don't know how ashamed I felt when I got there, Miss Douglass. I found her nursing her sick baby, and the poor little thing looked so

pale and wasted, I should hardly have known it for, the bright little creature I was playing with two weeks ago."

"Poor woman! She found it hard enough to get along, when they were all well. Do you suppose the baby is dangerously sick? What ails it?"

"Mrs. Warnock says the 'measles is round quite numerous, and she didn't know at first but it might be them she was a breedin',' but it was n't, and now she says the doctor thinks the 'babby' is much better. It begins to be a little cross, and she thinks that is a hopeful sign. But the poor woman has n't slept, she says, for three nights, and I wanted to ask you, Miss Douglass, if I might go down and take care of the baby tonight and let her rest."

"Do you know enough?"

"I think so. I have taken care of our baby at home when he was sick, and Mrs. Warnock says little Nora does not need anything but to be cosseted, and take her medicine once in two hours."

"Are you well and strong enough?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I am strong as a moose!" answered Belle, laughing, and displaying her vigorous round arms.

"Well, to-morrow is recreation-day, so that you can rest. You may go, but be sure to wear an easy wrapper, and to have something right warm to put on, extra, towards morning."

"Oh, Miss Douglass, it is the warmest day we have had; I was really uncomfortable out walking."

"Walking in the sunshine is one thing, and watching all night quite another, you will find. The air not only grows colder, but your own vitality runs down, so that you will be sure to be chilly by two or three o'clock. You had better take your thick jacket; a shawl is inconvenient in taking care of a sick person, especially a baby. Then you will need something to eat."

"Oh, Miss Douglass, I am sure I shall not care for anything!"

"It is much better for you to take something, and you see if you are not glad of it by the first cock-crowing. You would hardly feel like eating any of Mrs. Warnock's provisions, but you better take a little basket of lunch from the supper-table. You can leave it on the porch, if the house seems disagreeable, and then, sometime when your patient is asleep, you can step out and get it, and have a cold collation, all by your-

self, in the dead hours of night; only be sure Mrs. Warnock does not know it; she would feel hurt that you should bring anything to her house to eat."

"How you always think of everything!" said Belle. "Nannie will give me some of her crab apple jelly, and I will take some spread crackers and jelly. I don't suppose you know what a delectable lunch that is. Then I shall learn my long astronomy lesson while the baby is asleep. Only think, it will be clear gain to get so much extra time!"

"That is clear gain that turns to dead loss. Do not think of studying. It is quite enough to tire your body without making your mind work. Take something entertaining to read, that will help you keep awake, rather."

Some one else called, and Belle took leave. By nine o'clock she was at Mrs. Warnock's door, attended by Patrick, the man of all work. She thanked him, bid him good-night, slipped her basket of "delectable" crackers under the bench that ran along the low porch, and went softly

The tired mother did not brighten at the sight of her as much as she expected. The baby moaning in a weary way, and the moment

attempted to take it from its mother's arms, it lifted up its voice and wept. In course of time, however, it was laid asleep in its cradle, and she sat down to watch over it.

Mrs. Warnock sat on the other side, leaning her face in her hands and her elbows on her knees, relating all the ailments of her children, and her own tribulations in "raising" them. Belle listened impatiently. What was the use of her coming to hear all this. The woman had talked of being tired enough to drop, and why *didn't* she go to bed, now she had a chance. She had not observed life long enough to know that many people love so well to complain, they are willing to sit up nights to do it. At last, however, the mother was persuaded to retire to the little bed-room opening out of the kitchen, and leave the watcher alone with her charge.

The baby worried, and was quieted—slept, and woke crying. Belle took her up, gave her drink, rocked her, and sang softly to her, till at last the pitiful moaning hushed, and the child slept in her young nurse's arms.

It was a pretty picture;—background, a smoky, cracked wall, with a rude print of the Virgin and child upon it—surroundings, a warped deal table,

with a candle burned low in its iron socket, a broken tea-cup, and two rummy-looking tumblers of medicine upon it—a rickety chair or two, and for a cradle, a shoe-box on rockers—in the midst of this scene, like a diamond on a heap of rubbish, a beautiful girl, radiant with light and color even in the dim light of the tallow candle, soft folds of rich crimson falling about her shapely, healthy young form, thick veil of glossy black hair flowing over her shoulders, her lovely face bent over the pale little baby which lay in her lap, its blue-veined eyelids, half closed over the dim eyes, and its matted flaxen curls falling back over her arm. The widow's black shawl, which served for a blanket, over the coarse little white night-gown, heightened the effect.

Belle had a keen sense of the picturesque. She could not help knowing that her bright color and dress, her rich masses of dark hair and her plump, fair hands were in striking, beautiful contrast with the wan little snow-drop she was nursing. She knew it was a good and gracious thing, too, for a young lady to be denying herself sleep and all her home comforts to watch with her washer-woman's sick child. All at once she caught herself thinking how pretty she looked, and how

good it was of her to come, and, away down in some lurking-place of her heart, feeling as if it was a pity there was no one to see and admire. The blood flushed up in her cheeks for shame, and a smothered groan of self-loathing made little Nora start in her arms.

"Oh, this horrid, hateful vanity! Shall I never be rid of it? Why can't I do any thing simply and *right out*, for God's sake and my neighbor's, without forever thinking how *I* look and *I* act and who admires *me*!"

Poor Belle! Take heart. The fault that torments you is a hydra hard to kill, but you do hunger and thirst after righteousness, and you shall be filled—HIS word for it. No sin will live forever in a heart where it is hated and resisted.

This, Belle's great hindrance in following the Perfect One—self-consciousness and the longing for admiration—her friends aggravated by constant flattery. At school not a day passed but some girl was sighing in her ear, "What would n't I give to be as pretty as you!" Now that she was struggling after a higher life, it was a great grief and humiliation to her to find what a hold vanity had got upon her. She caught herself building castles in the air, where she was the observed of

all observers, beautiful, fascinating, kind, the centre of love and adulation. Then she would turn angrily upon herself and upbraid her vain imagination. She was disgusted to see how eagerly she listened to every fresh bit of praise, and how much more "perfectly lovely" seemed to mean, said of herself, than of any one else. And now, to find she could not even watch with a sick child, in the solitude of a poor widow's cottage and the darkness of night, without thinking how she looked and how kind she was—it was too much! Her head drooped low in shame and sorrow. Then, silent, but intense, went up a prayer to the Father watching over her more pityingly than she over the infant in her arms. She implored Him to deliver her from this fault; she relieved herself by pelting it with hard names;—"this weak, contemptible, shameful, loathsome vice of vanity." She told Him how mean she felt it was for her, so imperfect and sinful, to set herself up, with the good gifts He had bestowed upon her, like a little god, to be worshipped. Then she thanked Him for whatever beauty He had given her, that He had made her so she could easily attract others and give them pleasure, and she prayed fervently that she

might hold this precious power as a sacred trust to be used for Him.

That was a memorable night for Belle. To be sure, it was not the first time she had prayed for victory over this fault, nor was this by any means her last contest with it; but an advantage was gained that night which was never lost. Hitherto her effort had been to ignore the fact that she was beautiful, or at least not to care for it. That was past praying for. She had a warm love of beauty herself, and she could not look into a mirror without having it gratified. In the nature of things it was impossible to be unconscious as a bird or a flower. Besides, she could not help seeing how strangers were attracted to her—how people seldom caught a sight of her face without looking again—how her friends delighted in her beauty. In that silent night-watch she thought she found out the true way. Everything God had bestowed upon her was to be held and used in His service; could these personal charms be so consecrated? She felt, as never before, what a profanation it was to appropriate, as incense to her own vanity, the pure and precious endowment entrusted to her for noble ends. If ready access to other hearts had been given

her, it was that she might carry peace and joy. She made clean work of it. She laid her vanity at her Saviour's feet, begging Him to trample it out, whatever it cost her. She remembered, with a blush of shame, how often she had covertly courted adulation, and sternly resolved she would never do it again. Let the poison be ever so sweet she would shun it. She would try to live her life "right out"—without this continual reflexive.

Just here the baby made up a shocking face and woke, screaming.

"Did it have an awful dream? Well, it should n't wake its poor mammy if it did!" and Belle coddled and soothed her small patient, walked up and down the narrow floor with her, tried a little anise-seed tea, laid her over her shoulder and patted her back, laid her on a pillow, face down, back down, and after a variety of evolutions succeeded in getting her to sleep again. As soon as she attempted to put her in the cradle, however, she would make up a face and utter a little cry of warning. At last she had the satisfaction of seeing her slumbering in her shoe-box as peacefully as if it had been the cradle of all the Cæsars.

Just then it occurred to her that she was chilly and hungry, and that her eyes felt full of straws. She snuffed the candle with a pair of broken scissors, put on her thick jacket and stole softly out to smuggle in her lunch.

She stood in the low door and heard the night wind sleepily swaying the elm boughs that trailed on the roof, and she wondered to see how awe-struck the speechless earth lay in the night, and how watchful and pure the starry sky bent over it. She heard a robin stir in its nest and give one little sleepy chirp to its mate; then she thought of her charge in the cradle, so she found her little basket and went in from the wide, fresh, holy night to the close room with its small window. She wanted to leave the door open, but did not quite dare to. So she sat down, with one foot on the rocker, and, as she fed on her jellied crackers, her heart revived, her courage rose, she was thankful for Miss Douglass's care; then she wondered how it was she always thought of things beforehand, and if she ever was a heedless girl like her. Then she fell to thinking of them all, and fancying Grace and Helen fast asleep, with a sense of superiority that she should be awake. She thought of home, too,

and wondered what her mother would say if she knew she was playing nurse ; thinking of home, she floated off, speculating, as girls will, about her own history yet to be made, and then, somehow, as girls will, she fell to associating that history in a dreamy, half conscious way, with a certain handsome face and cavalierly, young figure, which had met her eyes of late, nearly everywhere she had been. What won't a girl's imagination do with a fellow when it gets hold of him !

Ned Carleton would have been amazed, amused, humbled, bettered, if he could have seen the hero he was getting to be in Belle Stanton's fancy. The fancy was founded on fact, too. There were certainly noble elements in Ned's character. He was generous and frank, thought of himself no better than he had a right to think, and was willing to pass for what he was worth. But he had the fault, so often fatal, of being "easily influenced"—swept along by the will of another, without heeding his own reason. Not that he was exactly irresolute or incapable of decision ; it seemed rather as if he had never waked to the reality and earnestness of life ; never roused himself to take the trouble of conducting his own

behavior, and so he yielded himself, without resistance, to the strongest current. Belle, in her innocent heart, little dreamed how strong or how ruinous a current had set in about him now, nor how fast it was sweeping him away from all safe and happy influences. She only knew "he was splendid," and, a little deeper, that he liked her better than he had ever said. Her fancy reveled in filling in the outlines his fine person and frank, gentlemanly manners and her slight acquaintance furnished.

But even this pleasant occupation palled at last. Belle was astonished to find the night so long. Could it be that between her laying her head on her pillow at night and the unwelcome "rising-bell" in the morning, there were always so many hours as this? She heard a rooster crow from a farm-yard over the hill, and she thought it the finest bird she had heard sing for many a day. She peeped through a hole in the green paper curtain to see if it was sunrise, but saw no signs of it, and wondered if the rooster did n't rest well that he should be crowing in the small hours of night. She tried to read, but the candle was dim and the print was poor. She looked at her watch—only half-past two! She had al-

ways supposed midnight was the middle of the night, but she concluded it was a great mistake. She laid her head against the rails of the wooden rocking-chair, and the next minute, as it seemed, woke with a start to find the baby had got her blanket off, and it was half-past three, and the rooster was crowing louder than before. She peered out of the hole in the curtain again and found, to her joy, that the night was growing pale. She stood looking and trying to remember the verse about them that watch for the morning. There began to be a soft stir among the birds and a general tuning for a *matinée*. Presently they began in good earnest, and how they did sing! She thought they must have got it up for her benefit. Certainly there could not be such a concert as that before she was awake other mornings.

It kept growing lighter in the east, yet so gradually that she could not trace the change. She did not think of it, but it was really very like what was going on within herself. No dazzling light had sprung up within her soul, but the love of God had dawned there, faint as this at first, but no less sure to reach the perfect day at last.

"Good! There is a stir in the bed-room," thought Belle. The old bedstead creaked, then came a long-drawn yawn. Mrs. Warnock's frowsy head appeared, asking after the "babby." Belle felt paid for her vigil when she got the rested mother's Irish blessing.

She gladly twisted up her hair, put on her hat and started for home, light-hearted as the birds that were still singing as if it were their last chance. It was so new and strange to be abroad before anybody else; and the world was so beautiful! The hills stood so sharp cut against the "opal-colored morn," with their crest of pines — one lone patriarch, taller than all the rest, watching like a sentinel at the gates of day. It was odd to see the houses with their eyes shut—still asleep. About the farm-house on the edge of the village, some one seemed to be astir; she could hear the "So!" and "Step!" from the barn-yard; then she heard the shrill sound of the first streams of milk coming down into the tin pail, and noticed how it softened into the foamy depths. As she went along the silent street, she wondered how people could be so stupid as to lie asleep in their stifled chambers while all this wonder of a new day was being

created—just as if she hadn't been glad to do it every day of her life.

As she turned into the main street, she heard a carriage rattle up from the stable to the door of "The Eagle." Then a wild yell burst upon the peaceful air, and fierce tones of dispute. Cry after cry, mad as a beast's, high as a woman's voice, loud as a man's! Her heart beat hard with dread—it sounded as if some one was being murdered. She quickened her steps with an instinctive impulse to run to the rescue. Suddenly the door of the hotel was thrown open—there was a scuffle on the threshold—then a man was supported by two others, down the steps to the close carriage which stood before the door. She could see that he resisted their attempt to put him into it; suddenly, he slipped out of their hands, darted across the street, and crouched down in the doorway of a store opposite. She was now so close upon them that she could hear one of them saying, coaxingly, "Come, Carl, come home!" She was passing swiftly by them, her head averted, when the crouching figure clutched at her dress, crying, in a thick voice, "Hullo! that's my girl, I'm going home with her."

She turned angrily to free herself, and saw—

Ned Carleton—*drunk*. In a moment she pulled the folds of her dress from his weak grasp, saw him stagger to his feet and try to offer her his arm, heard one of his companions say, “Here! here, Carl, stop that! Ain’t you ashamed of yourself?” and walked on as fast as her feet would carry her, hot blood of shame flushing her cheeks, hot tears of grief forcing their way to her eyes.

That red-eyed, silly, sodden creature—*Ned Carleton!*

Oh, what a fall for the hero of her dreams! Half the sky was flooded now with crimson and gold. The rejoicing sun sent gladness, like a herald, before him, but her heart no longer made answer. Sin and misery overshadowed all. She would willingly have slunk back from the joyous morning, into the solitude and darkness of the sick-room and the night. But she was already at Thornton Hall. The great house stood silent, with the curtains all down. She had promised herself great fun waking her friends, but she wished now they would sleep all day. The front door was locked, but Bridget, who was dusting the parlors, ran to open it, with, “Good-marnin’, Miss; ye’re bright an’ airy!” Belle tried to

return her greeting cheerily, but it was an effort to speak, and she stole quietly up to her own room, glad to find Nannie still asleep. It was only a few minutes, however, before she heard the long, loud peal of the "reveille," and the general stir of wakening life, and sleepy voices asking, "Has the rising-bell rung?" as if there could be any doubt of it!

Nannie, whose talking apparatus was always ready to run, even before breakfast, was up directly, full of questions and chat. Belle exerted herself to talk and laugh, but her voice sounded strangely to herself, it was so far away from her thoughts.

"Please get me excused from breakfast," she said, as Nannie was going down.

"What! when you have been ready for breakfast all night? What a pity to lose all that! But, then, I suppose you would rather have a nap."

Left to herself, Belle tried to lay this trouble where she had been learning to leave all her burdens—in her Saviour's hands. Ned Carleton would have been astonished to know that any human being was praying for him that morning; his boon companions would have made it an endless joke, if they had known a lovely girl was

praying for him. No matter; they never did know it; none but He who seeth in secret can know how much such prayers are worth to their unconscious subject.

The next day, as Belle and her room-mate were walking, they met Carleton, leaning on the arm of a fellow student. He doffed his hat with an unusually jaunty air, and sauntered on. Belle hardly acknowledged the salutation. There was a flavor of carousal still about him, which was revolting to her. She went on, trying to return Nannie's lively banter, but sick at heart.

It was not that she was in love with Ned Carleton; she was not. But she liked him; she had admired him; she had fancied there was a noble manhood coming in him, and it is torture to a generous young heart to be forced to recant its hero-worship.

A few evenings later, there was a concert in the village and the girls were out in full force—an agreeable sight in their fresh summer suits.

Soon after Belle Stanton had taken her seat, a gentleman came up the other aisle and took the place next her. Involuntarily, she turned away her head, the moment she saw him. What right had he to come in there, looking so bright and

so innocent, and seat himself beside her, when he had made an idiot of himself before her eyes. Oh, why could he not be just as good and true as he looked to-night! It took but a glance to show her that the effect of his carouse had worn away, and his better self was in the ascendant. She hardly heard the music. Blame and pity, and admiration and disgust distracted her heart.

All Carleton's attempts at civility were politely declined. Finally, a card was dropped in her lap, which she could hardly choose but read,

"Will Miss Stanton deign to tell me what has offended her?" E. A. C."

She turned the card and wrote,

"In front of The Eagle. Last Wednesday morning. Half past four o'clock.

'Oh wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ousrels as ither see us;
It wad frae mony a folly free us.'"

and handed it back. He read it eagerly, lifted his eyes to her face for one moment in perplexity, then he saw it all. The color rushed to his very temples, then left him pale. He offered no word of reply, but sat with folded arms, look-

ing straight at the violinist, as if absorbed ; but any one who knew his face could have discovered a great commotion under its calm.

The fellows had joked him as he came out of his "spree," about his gallantry to a pretty girl with a basket on her arm, who was passing as he left the hotel ; but who could have imagined Belle Stanton coming along High street before sunrise, just in time to see him make a fool of himself ! Getting intoxicated was really a new experience to Ned Carleton, and he had only a confused and disagreeable recollection of the time from midnight to midday after an evening with three other young gentlemen in a private parlor of The Eagle. Cigars, cards, popping of corks, clinking of glasses, bacchanalian songs, in a mixed medley, were his reminiscences of what the boys called "a jolly, high old time."

He had been drifting, all the year, feeling it was no great matter whether he did well or ill ; of course, he should come out right in the end. Wild oats might as well be sown and done with it. But that one look of Belle Stanton's eyes had shown him where he was and what he was coming to. What an unreadable mystery it is—how much one look can tell ! There was no

speech nor language, but Ned Carleton saw, blended in that young face, reproach and pity, and underneath them, trust, with fervent entreaty.

Ah, Belle, it was not for nothing God gave you that speaking face, nor is it in vain you have consecrated your beauty to Him. It has emphasized your mute appeal so that it can never be forgotten.

The next afternoon, as Connie Brewster was distributing the mail, she put her head in at Miss Stanton's door, saying,

"Belle, Miss Douglass wants to see you in her room."

To a few girls, that message was a sound of terror, but Belle had no concealments, and reckoned Miss Douglass one of her best friends. So she ran down without any misgiving.

"Please see whom this letter is from," said Miss Douglass, handing her one addressed to herself and mailed in Grattan. Drop letters were always opened and accounted for in the presence of the Principal. Belle saw, at a glance, the writing was the same as that on the card. She read the short letter and, after a moment's pause, said,

"Miss Douglass, I think I had better tell you all about this, for I don't know what to do."

So Belle related how she had first met Mr. Carleton at Mrs. Thornton's party, and frequently since at Prof. Greeley's, where they were both well acquainted ; told how prepossessing he was, and how much the Greeleys thought of him ; then described the disgraceful scene of Wednesday morning, the question and answer of the concert room, "and now this," putting the letter into Miss Douglass's hands.

It was :

MISS STANTON :—Perhaps it is presumption for one who has given you so much reason to despise him, to address you at all, but really you must suffer me to say one word, not to justify myself, but to express my deep mortification that I could for a moment have been such a brute as to give annoyance to one for whom I have no feeling but of respect and admiration.

I hardly dare offer so trite an apology as to assure you that as last Wednesday was the first time liquor ever mastered me, so it shall be the last.

If you could promise me you would try to

forget and forgive and to believe I will merit whatever confidence my friends are still willing to put in me, it would be a greater relief to me than you can understand.

I wish I were worthy to write myself,

Your friend,

EDWARD A. CARLETON.

“What can I do, Miss Douglass. Ought I to answer this or not?”

“It is hard to tell what is best. In general, the ministry of young ladies is more flattering than profitable to fast young men. Still it is possible that a few honest, earnest words from you might be a real help to him. I will think it over, and let you know this evening what I conclude. Meanwhile, you will be careful to keep the whole affair to yourself.”

“Oh, I *couldn’t* speak of it. I wouldn’t have the girls know about it for anything. Miss Douglass, I have got some light on that question I asked you the night of Mrs. Thornton’s party.”

“What was it, dear? I have forgotten.”

“What harm it is for a young man to be a little fast.”

In the course of the day, Miss Douglass took occasion to call at her friend's, Prof. Greeley's, and incidentally inquire about young Carleton of the Junior Class. She learned that he was an only child, whose mother had died early and whose father seemed to consider his duty fulfilled towards his motherless boy, in amassing a large fortune for him to squander; that he had known much of fashionable society, very little of good womanly home influence.

The result was that Belle was advised to write him a brief reply, simply something to make his resolution more strong.

Belle found that note worse to write than any composition. The first she tried sounded too anxious, almost affectionate; the next was so cold and stiff, she thought he would be sorry he made any apology; one form seemed to blame him too much, another to speak lightly of his fault. Finally, she said to herself, "I sha'n't suit myself, if I try all night," and carried down the last attempt. Miss Douglass sanctioned it, and sent it the next morning.

That little missive, written with fear and trembling, did Ned Carleton more good than its sender had any idea of. It was so earnest, so kind,

so delicately urgent, that he felt himself in honor bound to fulfil the best hopes of this lovely young friend. One phrase, especially, haunted him—"I was so disappointed in you."

It was pleasant to draw the inference that she had thought about him—that she expected nothing but good of him—and it was disagreeable in proportion to know how he had fallen in her esteem. He resolved to have back all the respect she ever had for him.

There is a period in a man's life when an attractive young lady can have more power over him than any other human being. He is full of rivalries with his fellows, contempt for a mother's fears, resistance to authority. His chivalric instincts first develop towards youth and beauty. If the young lady he most admires smiles at his peccadilloes, jokes about religion, gives him mock-lectures about his behaviour, delights in the smell of his cigar, sips wine with him, yields herself to immodest dances with him, dares not be true to the right lest he should think her puritanical—she is the aptest tool the Devil can get hold of to ruin him with.

On the other hand, there is no more powerful preacher of righteousness for a young man, from

eighteen to twenty-five, than a lively, winning, warm-hearted, right-minded girl, all whose beauty and brightness is sacred to truth and purity.

It is not so much by direct persuasion she can do him good ; that, as Miss Douglass remarked, is apt to be " more flattering than profitable," but by loving good and hating evil herself, and being not afraid to show it. Men expect women to be more sensitive in conscience than themselves ; they are often shocked to hear, from a woman's lips, what they would not scruple to say themselves ; and a girl abdicates one of the noblest rights of her womanhood, if she fears or fails to bear firm and modest witness to the truth.

Belle Stanton had no thought of performing any angelic mission to Ned Carleton, she did not think much about herself any way, and that was the best of it ; she only thought what a shame and what a pity it was for him to be throwing himself away, and he saw that she felt it. Her face, her few words at the concert, and this note, all made him keenly sensible that a " spree " was no joke with her—that it was a disgusting degradation of himself. At the same time, there was an appeal to the noble possibilities of his nature, which roused him to victory like a trumpet.

In closing, she had said, "Do not think it is
cant, when I tell you I believe you can do all
things through Christ."

At the time, he thought less of that sentence
than any other ; it only struck him as a frank con-
fession of faith ; but there came a time, after he
had more than once gone into temptation confi-
dent and come out worsted, when he read that
little note over for the twentieth time, and those
words sent him for help where he found it.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT BEYOND?



T was a June Sunday, one of those days full of soft sounds, when the earth looks clean and bright, as if it was just made. The Grattan girls spent their Sabbaths very quietly; but after tea, on a day like this, they had many a pleasant and memorable talk, as they strolled through their garden and grove.

Grace Fanshaw was sitting, alone, by a little brook that ran through the grounds, letting her thoughts float away on its ripple, when Miss Douglass and Helen Campbell strayed towards her.

"We break in on very sober meditations, to judge from your face," said Miss Douglass, as they sat down near her on the mossy roots of an old willow.

"I was thinking about going home," she replied, with a faint smile. The end of the school year was close at hand.

"You look as if the prospect was not exhilarating," remarked Helen.

"It is n't. I am afraid I shall never amount to anything if I go back there," said Grace, listlessly dipping the willow spray she held into the water, and watching to see it stem the current. "If any one would tell me just what I ought to do, I think I would do it," she added, with a heavy sigh.

"It is a good deal to be sure of that," said Miss Douglass.

"But not enough. I am at my wits' end to know what kind of a life I ought to live at home. Uncle and mother are eager to bring me out. 'Bring me out!' Pitch me in! Society is a whirlpool that will swallow me up body and soul. I would n't mind hard work, if there was anything to show for it afterwards; but burning your life out to keep up your part in an ever-

lasting farce is—not satisfactory. I know ladies in our set, chronic invalids at thirty, worn out by nothing else but the labor of enjoying themselves. If they had used themselves up in genuine work for anybody else, what an awful waste it would have been ! But so long as it is only fashionable excitement, it is according to the constitution and course of nature, American women are so frail, poor things!"

"But why need you throw yourself into this social dissipation?" asked Miss Douglass.

"Both my mother and my uncle are very fond of it," answered Grace, with a little hesitation, "and they will be terribly disappointed if I am not willing to be 'on the go' continually. It seems as if mamma's chief amusement was planning dresses for me already. I am sure it is very nice of her ; it is shocking to see some mothers so jealous of their own daughters. Then uncle—he is kind and generous as he can be, but he does love display, and he often says he needs a young lady to complete his equipage. Sometimes I doubt whether that is what I was made for."

"But they are very fond of you, and would n't they respect your motives if you wished to live a more earnest kind of life?"

"They never would try to compel me, but they would be hurt and displeased to have me break away from their style of living—the unending round of dressing, driving, parties, operas, theatres, flirtations.

"I like to be well dressed, and I enjoy what I call society, that is, the company of people I like; I delight in good music and fine acting, but this breathless chase after fashion and pleasure looks to me like vanity and vexation.

"'For a cap and bells our lives we pay.'

"I wouldn't so much mind crossing mamma's wishes about it," she added, after a pause, "for I think I could show her that papa would have liked my way, but uncle—it seems ungrateful to disappoint him, he has been so good to us. He was at unwearied pains to settle the estate for us; then he has made us completely at home with him, and he is always doing me some kindness."

"You certainly ought to please him, every way you can, without displeasing your Best Friend," said Miss Douglass.

"I have thought of that," answered Grace. "Whatever I owe to uncle, I owe far more to my Saviour. But the bother of it is, Miss Douglass,

that I can't see plainly what the Lord would have me do. He wants me to be grateful, obedient, self-forgetting; and on the other hand, He wants me to do His will as they do it in heaven, which I don't believe is just after the New York fashion."

"It is a hard place," said her friend, with sympathy; "you have to get your specific directions along with your daily bread, from head-quarters, but in general it must be your duty to make the family as happy as you can, and then to forestall this elaborate idling by getting your hands full of real work. With so much sin and ignorance and misery all about you, as there is in New York city, it cannot be right for you to devote your life to empty gayety to please any body. If you were to come down to a lower plane than your own conscience shows you, it would be doing your friends a harm instead of a kindness. You might have shown them a more excellent way."

"I can see it would be a good thing to get pre-occupied, but I don't know how to get at it, Miss Douglass. Of course I have not many squares to go to find wretchedness enough, but how to *do* anything for the poor is not so clear. To buy

an outfit for every bright ragamuffin I meet, and accompany him, with a loaf of bread in my hand, to that pallet of straw in the farther corner of the dingy apartment, where lies an emaciated figure, does n't seem to be just the thing."

"Not exactly," answered Miss Douglass, laughing, "though you would doubtless be called an angel of mercy, and find the expiring woman, whose countenance bore traces of remarkable beauty, a disinherited heiress.

"You can probably make yourself useful most effectively in connection with your church."

"We haven't any church. Uncle worships in Central Park, he says. When mamma goes anywhere, she chooses the place where she can hear the best music, and I go with her. We don't belong anywhere."

"That won't do," said Miss Douglass. "You will not thrive that way, and if you could, you would not be likely to do much for others. You must have a church home as soon as possible, my dear. Choose one where you think you will be best helped to grow up in all things into Christ, and become a member of it. Then take advice of experienced workers how to make yourself useful. If you can get the friendship of some moth-

erly Christian woman of good judgment, she will be your best counsellor. I assure you, patient, sensible, kind, Christian workers are needed, without number, though dainty and fitfully charitable ladies may hinder more than they help. Through your own servants and work people, too, you will find out cases where your care is needed. Actually to do good to all as you have opportunity, in this desultory way, I believe requires a more determined and thoughtful benevolence, than to bind yourself with vows to the life of a Sister of Charity or a deaconess."

"Then you don't think I ought to mind annoying uncle and mamma by doing anything singular, as they would think it?"

"Be modest and unobtrusive about your religion and your work; remember that you are much younger than they; be willing to waive even religious and intellectual pleasures to minister to their happiness. Remember that the kingdom of God is *within you*, but never, for their sake, join in any amusement you think your Saviour would condemn, nor be persuaded to give yourself up to the most innocent amusements, as if they were the business of life. Love is the best teacher. Love God with all your heart, and

your neighbor as yourself, and the way will grow plain. The poor are by no means the only people you can help. Think what a blessing a simple, earnest, Christian life may be among your own friends. There must be young ladies of your acquaintance who need just such a courageous character as yours, Grace, to lead them in the right way.

"I give you for your talisman, your Saviour's word—'Without Me, you can do nothing.'"

"I shall try to hold and be held," said Grace, gently. The willow wand had not yet been swept from her grasp, though she had been trailing it in the fast-running brook as she talked.

"There's Helen," she said, after a little, "will have as smooth sailing as can be. I almost envy you, Nell."

"You do! I should like to see you skimming milk and working over butter, making beds and washing dishes."

"Why," asked Grace, laughing, "do you do all those things?"

"Such is my high vocation. There are mountains of housework to be done at our house, and we keep but one servant girl; in fact, it is nearly as much as our lives are worth to keep her. So

let your fancy paint me, with broom and dust-pan for attributes."

"I should think it would be delightful," said Grace, with a pleased, curious expression.

"Wait till some August day, when you have spent the whole forenoon doing up shirts and dresses, and then broiled yourself getting dinner for half a dozen harvesters. Then, when you have got the dishes out of the way, and are just drawing together the blinds in your own room to lie down and read a good story while you cool off, see a carriage full of people from town driving up to spend the afternoon; not because they care anything about you, or you anything about them, but because it is *so* pleasant on a farm in summer. Put on the clean muslin you spent a whole hour ironing, and go down to smile and smile and be a villain, and see if you find it delightful!"

"I should hate the tiresome people," said Grace, "but I believe I should rather like the ironing and the harvesters and all that."

"'Distance lends enchantment,'" answered Helen, with an ominous shake of the head. "I have no taste for housework, and sometimes, Miss Douglass, I think it has been useless to stay

at school so long. I might have fried doughnuts and mended pantaloons without so much study."

"I did n't know mending pantaloons was part of housework," remarked Grace, who seemed much amused at the idea of Helen's knowing how to do these things.

"The worst part," answered her friend laconically.

"I think you will find use enough for all you know," Miss Douglass said. "As to the house-work, Paul said if you would learn to requite your parents, that would be good and acceptable before God. How could you better requite your good mother than by relieving her of this burden of housework and care? Is n't that motive enough to make the action fine?

"Housework in reasonable quantities is no bad thing for body or spirit, my experience testifies. As to wasted education, whatever your life is to be, you want a vigorous and well-furnished mind, for your own sake and your Maker's. You need not feel as if your light were to be put under a bushel, though a quiet farm-house should be your sphere. Whatever you know, will make you the fitter companion for that intelligent father and thoughtful mother of yours; then your home

brother has left school young, and it will lie very much with you to settle his tastes and habits for life. Your little sister, too! There is no end to the good you can do her."

"But we have so little time for study or reading, Miss Douglass, at least all through the summer and autumn."

"So much the more need of culture to fall back upon. I often think a woman needs a better education to start with than a man, because the life she has to live will not be likely to bring her mind either the food or the tonics his business will give him. But you must have a large range of usefulness outside your own home, Helen."

"I really don't see where, Miss Douglass. There are no poor people about us, and when any one happens to be sick, my mother is worth fifty of me."

"Poor people are not the only mortals that can be helped. A young lady of your ability and education is a godsend to any neighborhood. You bring up the standard of character and culture for all the young girls in your vicinity."

"The girls are shy of me," said Helen. "Being away so long, I have got unacquainted with them, and I cannot enjoy them as I do my friends

'here. They seem so shallow. Their little parties are so rough and hoydenish, I never go."

"That's the very point. If you have found out finer pleasures than they, help them up unto your vantage-ground. I know a young lady situated somewhat as you will be, who is doing that very thing, through a reading-circle of young girls she has formed. She selects books that will interest them and at the same time cultivate their taste. With her intelligent reading and comments, they learn to like a higher order of books than they would have attempted themselves. Besides this, she has started a little prayer-meeting for those that like to come, so that she is helping them spiritually as well as intellectually. Another, I think of, gathered about her a small literary club of young men as well as young ladies, for the sake of a younger brother and her Sunday-school class of large boys. It quite revolutionized the rude amusements of their set. One of those boys, now a gentleman just beginning his professional life, told me her influence had done more for him than any other. Then she was a great friend to the little children of the parish, teaching them to sing and getting up for them the most original and useful Sunday-

school concerts that ever were heard of. In fact, I could give you any number of examples of good accomplished just by young ladies of leisure, daughters at home. There is, in every place, a great deal of work lying around loose, belonging to nobody in particular, which they can better do than any one else. Even when you are cut off from outward effort, do not feel that you have nothing to do. There is always a kingdom to be conquered for Christ within you. No silent conquest there is lost."

"May I come, too?" asked Florence Hare, tripping down the path towards them.

"Yes, do. We are talking about what is to become of us after we are launched."

"I know what is to become of me, for one while," said Florence, with an expressive nod. "I am going to have a good time."

"How shall you go about it?" asked Grace.

"Oh, I am to spend the summer, most of it, with Nannie White. They live near the beach, and always have jolly summers. Then I shall go for a few weeks in autumn, to Hort Harvey's. Everybody says they live elegantly."

"I thought you did n't admire her," remarked Grace.

"Oh, well, we are quite good friends lately," said Florence, shrugging her plump shoulders. "She takes to me. The spring, Uncle Howard says I must spend with them in Philadelphia. We always have gorgeous times there; going all the time. Oh, I forgot to say, in the winter Nannie is coming to spend some weeks with me in Boston, in the height of the season. I expect we shall make the most of it."

"I hope you will make the most of it, Florence," said Miss Douglass, with a sober smile, taking her hand. "That makes a whole year of your life, does n't it! Do you know, I am rather suspicious of these long visits. It is my impression that a young lady who spends a great deal of time visiting, is not apt to make her life tell very much anywhere, nor be the comfort she might to those that love her best of all."

"But I do like it, Miss Douglass! They make more of you abroad than they do at home."

"That's frank," said the Principal, laughing. "Be sure, at all events, that your invitation always comes cordially from *the lady of the house*, and that your own visitors are a pleasure to the rest of the family as well as to you."

"Did you know Chris Croly was going in as

her father's book-keeper?" asked Florence, willing to turn attention from herself. "Isn't it horrid!"

"On the contrary, I think it is very nice and sensible," said Grace; "I only wish I had some business, though I can't say I should choose figures."

"Have you heard about Dilly Harper's plans?" asked Helen. "She has an uncle, it seems, who is a rich manufacturer, and he tells her if she will educate herself as a designer, he will promise her success. You know how very clever she is with her pencil. She is going to New York this winter, to study at the Academy of Design. Why don't girls study for some profession, or learn some business, when they are through school, just exactly as much as their brothers do? I am sure I should like it; though I don't know, for the life of me, what I should choose."

"One great difference is here," said Miss Douglass. "In a man's life-work, marriage makes no change—only gives him new motives for doing it well; but in a woman's, it makes, and should make, all the difference in the world.

"Here is a girl studying law, promising to make a fine counselor, but, lo! the conquering

hero comes—she is courted—captured—married—and the law is over with. What of it! One Christian home, filled with the spirit of a wise, tender, thoughtful mother, is worth forty lawyers. It is hardly to be expected that young women of eighteen or twenty should enter on long years of hard study in preparation for a profession, with quite the same zeal as their brothers, when they know their plans are liable to be upset any day by so simple and natural an event as their falling in love."

"But if she chose, she could practice her profession after she was married."

"Hardly; unless she was so unfortunate as to have no children. A woman with all a mother's interruptions, could not compete in business with men. Besides, the duties of wife, mother, hostess, member of society, give ample room and verge enough for a woman's powers; the only trouble is that so few prove equal to the situation. It is a great thing to rule a woman's kingdom well."

"Then you don't approve of women fitting themselves for any particular business?" asked Grace.

"I don't say that, by any means. I do approve

of it. I would have every woman qualified to earn an honest living, and every girl ready to do her share of the world's work. I only meant to say that women, in general, will never stand on the same ground as men, in general, as to outside pursuits. The great majority of them wish to be, will be, and ought to be, occupied with the absorbing, all-important duties of home.

"For an unmarried woman, it is a great misfortune to have no definite profession, and there is many a mother, too, that at some period of her life needs and wants employment beyond her family. So I would encourage every girl that has the least heart for it, whether her circumstances require it or not, to train herself for some honorable, useful, womanly business. It is amusing to hear people reason that it is dangerous to let them do so, lest they should lose their taste for matrimony; as if every other gate must be shut before they could be driven through that. If love, and marriage, and home, and motherhood are of human devising, there may be danger; but nature is not so easily thwarted. I believe it would go far to save girls from the degradation of marrying just for a home, and would

give more dignity to their lives, more substance to their thoughts."

"Why don't you advise me, then, to go to a medical college, or a commercial college, or something, instead of going home and to work?" asked Helen.

"There seems to be more urgent demand for good housekeepers than for more doctors or merchants, just at present," answered Miss Douglass. "Still, I don't think housekeeping, unless in your own home, is your vocation, Helen. This is your case; just as your brother Frank settles down at home, not because he has any particular taste for farming, but because his father needs him, so you go to the help of your mother. By the time Kate is ready to take your place, you may see more clearly than now what you want to do with yourself. Often, when a girl has educated herself as well as she could, and goes faithfully about the little duties that lie nearest, she finds larger just beyond."

"That reminds me of what I heard yesterday about Laura Maynard," said Helen. "It seems her father's health has been feeble for a few years past, so that he has to go South every winter. She began to help him and act for him where she

could, and got in deeper and deeper, till now she manages all the business of that large manufactory, and does it splendidly, they say, without the least fuss. You know what a refined, modest girl she was!"

"Yes, but remarkably clear-headed and energetic."

"Now my father's business is n't anything I can learn."

"No; but if your calling is what I think it is, you could n't have a better training for it than this experience at home;—learning life as it is, with grand scenery and fresh human nature around you, assimilating your book-knowledge by help of the real world, with a good deal of leisure for thought along with wholesome exercise for the body."

"Why, what do you think my calling is?" asked Helen, with her eyes as well as her mouth.

"Oh, you will hear it soon enough if it is a real one."

"I know!" exclaimed Grace; "to write."

"Come, girls, the grass will be getting damp, we must not sit here any longer," said Miss Douglass, rising.

As they sauntered towards the house, other

groups joined them, and all turned, before going in, to receive the good-night benediction of the Father of Lights, beaming on them from the western sky.

"How we shall miss you next year!" Miss Douglass exclaimed, as her eyes fell from the softly radiant clouds to rest on the glowing faces around her, "you seniors. You have been dear, good girls!"

They gathered more closely around her, for Thornton Hall had been made a second home to them, and the thought of leaving it was a very tender one.

"I am only afraid you *won't* miss us, Miss Douglass," said Grace. "Here are Virginia, and Belle, and Alice, and Kate, and so many more coming back, and then such a descent of new scholars upon you, it seems as if you would forget us as soon as we were well off your hands."

"Forget you! What is to give me courage for the 'new girls' when they come, but the thought of the 'old girls,' living noble lives in so many homes! Forget you? Ye are my joy and crown!"

"If I thought of you as going out to flutter through a few sunny seasons, and then settle

down to a flat, stale and unprofitable existence, whining over your school days as your happiest years, it would be a sad parting indeed ; but I am persuaded better things of you. You go to do the dear Master's work, to grow into His image. Your path must be brighter and brighter. to the perfect day. Oh, that perfect day, girls ! What will it be ? We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is, in the presence where is fullness of joy for evermore."

THE END.



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